

Classroom Guide

The Fabled Fourth Graders of Aesop Elementary School

written by Candace Fleming

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A note to the teacher: The activities for this book were designed for students old enough to read and process the content of this book.



Themes:

- ◆ A Little Background on Aesop and Fables
- ◆ The Moral of the Story
- ◆ Storytelling as an Oral Tradition

About the Book

The Fabled Fourth Graders of Aesop Elementary School is a collection of contemporary fables about a hilariously rambunctious group of kids, fearlessly led by a globetrotting, Mayan-ceremonial-robe-wearing teacher named Mr. Jupiter.

About the Author

Candace Fleming is the author of numerous books for children, including *Ben Franklin's Almanac*, an ALA Notable Book and an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, as well as *Muncha! Muncha!*, *Gabriella's Song*, and *When Agnes Caws*, all ALA Notable Books.

Things to think about before you read the book

- ◆ Does anyone you know always use an expression to explain something? Examples might be "If you wrinkle your face up it will stay that way," or "do as I say, not as I do," or "if you eat too much candy your teeth will fall out." Make a list of expressions people you know use.
- ◆ Have you ever read any of Aesop's fables? If so, which ones do you know? (Note to the teacher: a fable is a short story that teaches a moral or a lesson. Fables have been around almost as long as spoken language and often use animals as the main characters.)
- ◆ Does anyone in your family tell stories? What are their stories about? Do they talk about adventures they had when they were younger?
- ◆ Think about teachers you have had in the past. This person could be a school teacher, a music teacher, a coach or someone from a church, camp or after-school club. Can you remember a time when they did something strange, memorable, or extra-special?

A Little Background on Aesop and Fables

Who was Aesop?

Aesop may have lived in ancient Greece (620-560 BC) and he may have been a slave. Many of the fables he is credited with writing were actually created long before his lifetime. Today the phrase “Aesop’s Fables” has become a general term to describe any collection of brief fables, usually involving personified animals.

What is a fable?

Fables, short stories that teach a moral or lesson, have been around almost as long as spoken language. Their roots go back to India, where they were connected to the mystical sage Kasyapa, and were adopted by the early Buddhists. It is thought that Socrates changed Aesop’s fables into verse while he was in prison. Demetrius Phalereus, another Greek philosopher, created the first collection of these fables around 300 B.C, which was then translated into Latin by the slave Phaedrus, around 25 B.C. Around A.D. 230, Babrius retranslated the fables from these two collections into Greek. The collection was later translated to Arabic and Hebrew, with additional fables from these cultures being added.

The Moral of the Story

A CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: USING THE MORAL LESSON AND WORKING BACKWARDS

1. Start with the moral/lesson of a fable. A list is included here from the chapters in *The Fabled Fourth Graders of Aesop Elementary School*.
2. Divide the students into small groups and have them brainstorm situations that might result in that moral/lesson being learned. For example: “You can’t judge a book by its cover” could relate to a new student in class who looks different from everyone else. Perhaps he/she is beautiful/rich/outgoing and everyone is in awe until they see an uglier side. Or perhaps a family sits down to a meal that looks unappetizing but tastes wonderful. Let the students play with all kinds of different scenarios.
3. Put groups together and have them share their probable plots with each other.
4. Have each group select one brainstormed scenario.
5. Remind them of storytelling elements: every story needs a beginning, middle and end; the story needs characters, a setting, and a conflict; the moral of a fable comes at the end after a conflict/problem has been resolved.
6. Talk about the structure of a fable. Look at four or five fables. What elements do all the fables share? Are they different in any way? Use your discoveries to support the following activities.

7. Options for expanding scenarios created from fable morals/lessons:
- a. Act it out: Have the students create a short play/skit based on their scenario. Have each group perform their final piece for the rest of the class.
 - b. Write a story: Have the students write a story based on one of the scenarios they discussed. Illustrate if desired and share with the rest of the class.
 - c. Create a cartoon: Using the form provided on page 5, have the students create a simple cartoon of the scenario they choose. The moral/lesson will be in the last box (#8). The eight parts might be:
 - 1) Introduce the characters
 - 2) Introduce the setting
 - 3) Introduce the problem
 - 4) Have the character encounter the problem
 - 5) Have the character search for a solution
 - 6) The character continues to look for a solution
 - 7) The character finds a solution
 - 8) Moral/lesson

For example, in the story of the crow and the pitcher the images would be:

- 1) A crow that is very thirsty
- 2) A large tree with a pitcher of water sitting on a table—perhaps a picnic setting
- 3) The crow sees the pitcher and tries to take a drink.
- 4) His beak isn't long enough
- 5) He sees a stone on the ground.
- 6) He puts a stone in the pitcher.
- 7) He fills the pitcher with stones and the water comes to the top.
- 8) The crow is drinking and the moral is stated.

MORAL LIST

- ◆ It is one thing to talk about it, another to do it. (*Mr. Jupiter Goes Fourth*)
- ◆ He laughs best who laughs last. (*The Absent Minded Morning*)
- ◆ You can't judge a book by its cover. (*The Librarian in Love*)
- ◆ Try to please all, and you end up by pleasing none. (*Picture Day*)
- ◆ It is wise to prepare for today for the wants of tomorrow. (*Dance, Stanford, Dance*)
- ◆ Be careful what you wish for, it might come true. (*Calvin Goes to Kindergarten*)
- ◆ Liars are not believed even when they tell the truth. (*The Boy Who Cried Lunch Monitor*)
- ◆ One good turn deserves another. (*Please Don't Tease Ashley Z.*)
- ◆ The squeaky wheel gets the grease. (*Pffft!*)
- ◆ Slow and steady wins the race. (*There Once Was a Man from Dancart*)
- ◆ In times of dire need, clever thinking is the key. (*The Bad, the Beautiful, and the Stinky*)
- ◆ Necessity is the mother of invention. (*Dewey or Don't We?*)
- ◆ Half a handful is better than none. (*Ham and Beans*)
- ◆ Honesty is the best policy. (*Missy's Lost Mittens*)
- ◆ No act of kindness—no matter how big or how small—is ever wasted. (*Sticks and Stones*)
- ◆ Time is often wasted on things of little consequence. (*March Madness*)
- ◆ Misery loves company. (*Catch!*)
- ◆ Those who pretend to be what they are not, sooner or later find themselves in deep water. (*The Problem with Being Earnest*)
- ◆ Practice what you preach. (*Humphrey's Lunch*)
- ◆ Don't count your chickens before they're hatched. (*The Spelling Goddess*)
- ◆ Appearances aren't everything. (*First Kiss*)
- ◆ There is a time and place for everything. (*Mr. Jupiter Tables the Fifth*)

Curriculum connections:

writing, history, teamwork, social skills, literature

A Cartoon Fable by _____

1	2
3	4
5	6
7	8

A CLASSROOM ACTIVITY FOR OLDER OR MORE ADVANCED STUDENTS:

Which Fable is which?

Can you identify which fable inspired each chapter? A great way to do this is to give the students copies of the fables ahead of time and have them identify key elements. For example: What is the lesson the main character learned in this fable? What is the problem and/or what does the main character need or want?

Read *The Fabled Fourth Graders of Aesop Elementary School*. Select a few fables from the list below. To find text for the historic fables, go to www.aesopfables.com.

CHAPTER TITLES AND THE FABLES THAT INSPIRED THEM

- ◆ Mr. Jupiter Goes Fourth The Mice in Council
- ◆ An Absentminded Morning The Heifer and the Ox
- ◆ The Librarian in Love
- ◆ Picture Day The Miller, His Son, and Their Donkey
- ◆ Dance, Stanford, Dance The Ant and the Grasshopper
- ◆ Calvin Goes to Kindergarten The Old Man and Death
- ◆ The Boy Who Cried Lunch Monitor The Boy Who Cried Wolf
- ◆ Please Don't Tease Ashley Z..... The Ant and the Dove
- ◆ Pffft!.....
- ◆ There Once Was a Man from Dancart The Hare and the Tortoise
- ◆ The Bad, the Beautiful, and the Stinky
- ◆ Dewey or Don't We? The Crow and the Pitcher
- ◆ Ham and Beans..... The Boy and the Filberts
- ◆ Missy's Lost Mittens Mercury and the Woodman
- ◆ Sticks and Stones The Lion and the Mouse
- ◆ March Madness
- ◆ Catch! The Fox Without a Tail
- ◆ The Problem with Being Earnest.....
- ◆ Humphrey's Lunch.....
- ◆ The Spelling Goddess The Milkmaid and Her Pail
- ◆ First Kiss The Ant and the Chrysalis
- ◆ Mr. Jupiter Tables the Fifth

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Storytelling as an Oral Tradition

Live storytelling is a part of almost every cultural tradition. It has been used to teach history, settle arguments, make sense of the world, entertain, communicate lessons, or information and share family stories.

Theater is a way for students to bring stories to life. It is also a great equalizer. Shy students find new ways to express themselves, smart students aren't always right, and those with limitations discover they have none.

Theater is also a good tool for exploring fables—stories designed to be read out loud or acted out. Fables were originally passed down verbally so sharing them in an interactive way with an audience is the ideal way to experience how they were originally shared.

(For more information on storytelling and children, go to the “Reading Is Fundamental” website at www.rif.org/educators/articles/storytelling.msp)

A CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: THE LION AND THE MOUSE

1. Read the fable *The Lion and the Mouse*

There once was a mouse that decided to run up and down on a sleeping lion. The lion woke up and grabbed the mouse. As he opened his mouth to eat the mouse, the mouse cried out; “I am so sorry, great lion. Please forgive me! If you do I will never forget it. Maybe some day I can do you a great kindness.” The thought of the little mouse helping the lion made the lion laugh and he let the mouse go. Many weeks later the little mouse heard a great roar and discovered the lion caught in a net by some hunters. “I can save you!” the mouse cried, nibbling at the ropes. Soon the lion was free. “Thank you little friend,” the lion roared. “It is good that we were able to help each other in the end.”

Moral or Lesson: Little friends may prove great friends.

2. Improvisation games emphasize working together as a group. For more ideas, go to www.improvincyclopedia.org. In an improvisation game, there is no winner. The goal is to get everyone participating and celebrate teamwork.

- ◆ **Pass Catch:** Have the group form one big circle. One player starts the game by facing the person on his/her right and making a gesture and a sound. That person immediately imitates that gesture and sound, then turns to the person on his/her right and makes a totally different gesture and sound. Some variations: instead of passing the sound and gesture to the person on the right, players can pass to any other person in the group. Or try the game without imitating the sound and gesture received; just have the players turn around and throw a new gesture and sound to someone else in the group as quickly as possible.
- ◆ **Animals:** For this game you need an even number of players. Assign everyone an animal type; be sure there are at least two of each type. Keep the animal assignments secret from the rest of the group; each player only knows the type of animal they are. Give the group a number of activities to perform as their animal type. For example:

Eating, drinking, grooming, sleeping, and playing. After all the activities have been performed, ask the players to find the other animals of their kind.

- ◆ **Synchro Clap:** Have the group form a big circle. One player starts the game by making eye contact with another player. Then they both clap their hands at the same time. The “receiving” player then makes eye contact with another player and they “synchro-clap.” Once a rhythm is established, start accelerating slowly.

A CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: READER’S THEATER

Copy the reader’s theater piece and distribute it to the class. Have them read it in small groups or divide the class into three parts. Look at other fables from Aesop and turn them into reader’s theater pieces. Some fables that would work well are: “The Tortoise and the Hare,” “The Boy Who Cried Wolf,” and “The Lion and the Mouse.” (Text available at www.aesopfables.com)

The Crow and the Pitcher

A note: The chapter *Dewey or Don’t We?* in *The Fabled Fourth Graders of Aesop Elementary School* is based on this fable. This Reader’s Theater piece calls for three readers. They can be individual readers or the class can be divided into three groups.

Reader One: A crow

Reader Three: Half-dead with thirst

Reader Two: Caw! Caw!

Reader One: Came across a pitcher

Reader Two: A pitcher?

Reader One: An empty pitcher that had once been filled with water.

Reader Three: Well it wasn’t completely empty. There was a little water left in the bottom.

Reader Two: Unfortunately...

Reader Three: When the Crow put his beak into the mouth of the pitcher

Reader One: To drink that little bit of water that was left

Reader Three: The Crow discovered that his beak wasn’t long enough to reach the water.

Reader Two: Tough luck.

Reader Three: He tried

Reader One: And he tried

Reader Two: But at last he had to give up.

Reader One: Then the Crow thought of something

Reader Three: Brilliant!

Reader Three: He took a pebble off the ground

Reader One: And dropped it into the pitcher.

Reader Three: Plunk!

Reader Two: Smart crow

Reader One: Then he took another pebble and dropped it into the pitcher.

Reader Two: And another

Reader Three: And another

Reader One: He took pebble after pebble and dropped them into the pitcher.

Reader Two: Plunk!

Reader Three: Plunk! Plunk!

Reader One: Plunk! Plunk! Plunk!

Reader Three: Finally

Reader One: At last

Reader Two: After working really hard

Readers One, Two, Three: Victory!

Reader Three: The Crow saw that the water was getting closer to the top of the pitcher

Reader Two: So he dropped in a few more pebbles

Reader One: Until the water was finally close enough to the top for the Crow to take a drink.

Reader Two: Ahh...

Reader Three: And the moral of the story is...

Readers One, Two, Three: Little by little does the trick! Or ... Necessity is the mother of invention!

Companion Books

NOVELS

Ella Enchanted by Gail Carson Levine, Scholastic Books, 1997

The Goose Girl by Shannon Hale, Bloomsbury USA Children's Books, 2005

Just Ella by Margaret Peterson Haddix, Simon Pulse, 2007

The Report Card by Andrew Clements, Aladdin, 2005

FABLES AND STORYTELLING RESOURCES

McElderry Book of Aesop's Fables by Michael Morpurgo, illus by Emma Chichester Clark, Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2005

Storytelling for the Fun of It: A Handbook for Children by Vivian Dubrovin, illustrated by Bobbi Shupe, Storycraft Pub, 1999

Three-Minute Tales by Margaret MacDonald, August House, 2004

Resources for the Teacher

BOOKS

Aesop's Fables by Lisbeth Zwerger, North-South , 2006

Aesop's Fables: a classic illustrated edition edited by Russell Ash, Chronicle Books, 1980

Aesop's Fables translated by Laura Gibbs, Oxford University Press, 2003 (scholarly reference)

Disabled Fables: Aesop's Fables, Retold And Illustrated By Artists With Developmental Disabilities Members of L A Goal and Sean Penn, Star Bright Books , 2005

Dramatizing Aesop's Fables: Creative Scripts for the Elementary Classroom by Louise Thistle, Smith and Kraus, 1995

Raising Voices: Youth Storytelling Groups and Troupes by Judy Sima, illus by Kevin Cordi, Unlimited, 2003

Ready-To-Tell Tales by David Holt, August House, 1995

WEBSITES

www.aesopfables.com

a collection of over 650 fables

www.edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=240

National Endowment for the Humanities: Aesop and Ananse animal fables and trickster tales

www.education-world.com/a_lesson/dailyp/dailyp/dailyp003.shtml

critical thinking with fables new and old – lesson plan

www.quotationpage.com/quotes/Aesop

a collection of quotes by Aesop