Sometimes when you have dealt with certain things forever, you don’t know they are even there. Explaining water to a fish would be difficult, and it might be hard for you to understand just how strange the word Wednesday is. We see through certain things so often that it is sometimes very difficult to look at them. Some of the stories found in the fables of Aesop are very much in this category.

Even if you have never read through *Aesop’s Fables*, you are no doubt acquainted with many of them. Who has not heard of the boy who cried wolf? And everyone knows who won the famous race between the hare and the tortoise. These fables have made their way into many children’s books and animated films, and they have had whole stories develop around them. They have been passed down and around in many forms for literally ages and ages. These simple short tales have inspired artists and authors alike. An original 1912 edition translated by V.S. Vernon Jones (with an introduction by G.K. Chesterton and illustrated by Arthur Rackham) sells now for hundreds of dollars. But you can find a facsimile edition for much less and still enjoy Rackham’s fabulous illustrations, and in addition to the text used for this course, you can read the fables in many different and easily available versions.

So perhaps we should begin by discussing the genre of fable. What is a fable? Technically speaking, *The Harper Handbook to Literature* defines a fable as “a short, allegorical story in verse or prose, frequently of animals, told to illustrate a moral.” The word *fable* comes from the Latin *fabula* and simply means “little story.” A fable’s purpose is didactic, though many are quite entertaining as well. But the purpose of the fable is to teach a little lesson, to give a little advice, to comment on the ways of the world, or to satirize man and his foibles. This is why *Aesop’s Fables* have become such popular material for children’s books—it contains just the sort of life lessons that children need.

**Aesop’s Fables**

One of the most popular fables used in children’s books is “The Hare and the Tortoise.” Disney made a memorable cartoon of this story as well.
Author and Context

Though the fables themselves predate the man known for them, Aesop became credited for passing them on, though he never wrote them down. G.K. Chesterton says, “...his fame is all the more deserved because he never deserved it. The firm foundations of common sense, the shrewd shots at uncommon sense, that characterize all the Fables, belong not to him but to humanity.” In other words, these morals resonate with everyone at all times in history.

Nothing too certain is known about Aesop himself, but the legendary tradition surrounding him is that he was a slave and a storyteller who lived in ancient Greece six centuries before Christ (from 620–560 B.C.). According to Herodotus, he was thrown off a cliff in Delphi by the citizens there, though the reason for this is unknown. Some have speculated that he was troubling the populace with his wisdom. Plato mentions that Socrates spent some of his time in prison putting Aesop’s fables into verse. The first known written collection of his fables appeared around 300 B.C., and a few centuries later a Thracian slave named Phaedrus (15 B.C.–A.D. 50) translated them from Greek prose into Latin verse. In 1484 William Caxton printed the first English edition, and in 1692 the first English version specifically written for children appeared. Over the ages collections have been translated and retranslated into many languages, some with additional fables from other sources. Now there are many volumes of *Aesop’s Fables* available worldwide, where they continue to endure as a well-loved form of folk literature.

Herodotus asserts that Aesop was a slave (*Histories*, II.134) and that he met his death by being cast from a cliff at the hands of the citizens of Delphi. A medieval legend that he was deformed and ugly is not corroborated by more ancient sources, but despite this the myth persists, and this bust from the Villa Albani in Rome is said to depict a deformed Aesop.

Significance

G.K. Chesterton observes that in a fable, “The wolf will be always wolfish; the fox will be always foxy... by using animals in this austere and arbitrary style... men have really succeeded in handing down those tremendous truths that are called truisms.” Whenever men are in the story, they are capable of a change of heart, but when you use animals, you can expect the nature of the animal to be fixed. Thus we have the industrious ants showing no mercy to the hungry, idle grasshopper, or the sneaky fox stealing the proud crow’s cheese by flattery. To quote Chesterton again: “...all these are deep truths deeply graven on the rocks wherever men have passed. It matters nothing how old they are, or how new: they are the alphabet of humanity. ...” The fables illustrate simple truths about life, taught in memorable ways through exchanges with talking beasts and the occasional man or woman. Whether an individual man or woman repents or not, the way things are stays the same.
Main Characters

The main characters in the fables are animals, objects like pots or even a pail of milk and a honey jar, the gods (Venus, Mercury, Jupiter, or Hercules), and nature itself, as in “The Wind and the Sun” or “The Farmer and the Sea.” Many of the fables have unnamed human characters, like a boy, a blacksmith, a shepherd, a farmer, a fisherman, a maid, a goatherd, a widow, or a woodcutter.

Summary and Setting

Each fable is driving to a point, and the point is a maxim or pithy saying. Consider this small sampling: The value of an object is in the eye of the beholder. Uninvited guests are most welcome when they leave. Only fools try to take the credit due to others. The more you want, the more you stand to lose. Grasp at the shadow, and you will lose the substance. So the plot in each fable is merely a vehicle to carry the point home. Some of the fables are as short as three or four sentences. Some, like “The Country Mouse and the Town Mouse,” can run a page and a half. Characterization depends largely on what we might expect from the animal in the story. No one has to tell us half. Characterization depends largely on what we might expect from the animal in the story. No one has to tell us.

Worldview

Though people of any religion and background can identify with the stories in the fables, it would be superficial to identify them as representing any particular religion. Though some may sound similar to biblical proverbs (who could disagree with “honesty is the best policy”), they deal mostly with hard luck and hard consequences, very much like the world of the blues. This is a very strict reap-what-you-sow world. We do not see the biblical virtues of mercy and forgiveness in the fables, but rather common sense that comes from living in a dog-eat-dog world. The wolf dressed like a sheep is caught and killed; the hungry grasshopper begging for food is left to starve. The main characters in the fables are animals, objects like pots or even a pail of milk and a honey jar, the gods (Venus, Mercury, Jupiter, or Hercules), and nature itself, as in “The Wind and the Sun” or “The Farmer and the Sea.” Many of the fables have unnamed human characters, like a boy, a blacksmith, a shepherd, a farmer, a fisherman, a maid, a goatherd, a widow, or a woodcutter.

For the Christian student, reading the fables can and should be delightful. Not only are they enjoyable in themselves, but it is always enlightening to read literature that has survived millennia and been honored throughout that time for good reason. Such endurance certainly lends a respectability that should continue to be honored.

The common sense found in the fables that comes from practical experience in the world, though admirable, is not the same thing as the complete wisdom that comes from above. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:18–19, “Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.” And James says, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17). The fables do not attain to this level of wisdom, although they certainly teach the value of common sense. God bestows His common grace on the world, and mankind loves to teach one another these precepts as far as they go. These fables were most likely stories passed down from fathers to their children, teaching them the ways of the world. So the Christian reader can appreciate the fables and the limited picture they portray.

The fables are more about law than grace, which is always easier for fallen man to relate to. We gravitate to law-making, and we look to the rule, moral, or lesson being taught. Man was born to learn and born to teach. Man has a harder time understanding pure grace because it goes against our nature. It is much easier to understand the law: work hard, do not listen to liars, always be wary of flatterers. Much common sense is like this and falls in the category of good advice. Man will always devise moralistic, cautionary tales to instruct others on how to get on in this life. The Christian is no exception when it comes to devising rules and looking for the law. Yet the Christian must look for grace beyond this, and view life as a means of bringing God glory, not as an opportunity to get by with the least trouble and the most success.

Though our text includes over two hundred fables, we will consider just a sampling of them, looking at a number of the more well-known fables. We’ll begin with “The Fox and the Grapes” where we get the expression “sour grapes.” The hungry fox spies some delicious-looking grapes, but try as he might, he cannot reach them for all his jumping. So rather than being disappointed with his loss, he decides that the grapes were probably too sour to eat anyway. This is the behavior of the poor loser, and it is self-deception as well. He knows full well that the grapes were delicious, but he would rather tell himself a lie than admit his own defeat. So we have a prideful and lying fox,
which is consistent with what we expect from the crafty nature of the fox. The tale does not condemn the fox; neither does it commend him. Rather, it is simply illustrating for us the typical, fleshly response to defeat.

The Ants and the Grasshopper has as its moral “Idleness brings want.” It readily reminds us of Proverbs 6:6–11: “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep—So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, and your need like an armed man.” In this fable the lazy, half-dead grasshopper appeals to the industrious little ants for a handout, but he meets with no pity. Again, this illustrates all law and no grace. They told him that since he had spent his summertime singing, perhaps he could dance all winter. Not only do they shut him out, they laugh as they do so. No mercy here. In contrast consider Proverbs 14:20–21: “The poor man is hated even by his own neighbor, but the rich has many friends. He who despises his neighbor sins; but he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he.” God blesses the merciful because He is the father of all mercies Himself (2 Cor. 1:3). In this fable the law slams down on the grasshopper, and the ants are exonerated. In Scripture, the same principle is operative—laziness does lead to poverty—but another principle is operative as well: mercy triumphs over judgment.

One of the fables that Disney has used for a cartoon is “The Country Mouse and the Town Mouse,” though Disney named it The Country Cousin. This is one of the longest fables in the collection, and it also evokes a teaching found in Proverbs: “Better is a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full of feasting with strife” (17:1). The country mouse concludes the fable with, “But I’d rather have a crust in peace and safety than all your fine things in the midst of such alarm and terror.” This is basic to understanding contentment and also illustrates the dangers and temptations associated with living in wealth and luxury. The town mouse is captured by his worldly friend’s fine talk, and he was quite pleased with the new arrangement, thinking contemptuously of his previous situation, until the revelers and the dogs burst in. It was then that the country mouse came back to his senses, seeing that his lowly life had some things money could not buy. The self-respecting country mouse had gleaned from the fields (barley, nuts, etc.), and the conceited city mouse was eating leftovers off the tables of the rich.

“The Hare and the Tortoise” must be the most popular fable for children’s books, and Disney made a memorable cartoon of this story as well. Slow and steady wins the race is a maxim with plenty of applications. This is reminiscent of Poor Richard’s Almanac, or Proverbs again: “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (16:18). The hare is full of himself, boastful and ridiculing the tortoise. But the tortoise is game for the contest and exhibits the good quality of follow-through. He does not flake out like the hare. Another biblical quotation illustrating the same principle comes to mind: “Let not the one who puts on his armor boast like the one who takes it off” (1 Kings 20:11).

“The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf” is a cautionary tale that many parents have told their children to illustrate the dangers of lying. “Even when liars tell the truth, they are never believed” is true as far as it goes. As we know, Satan is the father of all lies (John 8:44). But we also know that lies can be forgiven, that God can apply His grace to the liar’s heart and wash away the sinfulness of it all. In this fable, the sheep were left to the mercy of the wolf, which is to say they received no mercy at all. They were raged by the wolf because of the careless shepherd boy’s foolishness. Sin always has consequences, and sometimes they fall on the innocent bystanders. A liar always leaves destruction in his wake. The townspeople had lost patience with the shepherd boy, and again we see law, not grace, and we don’t even know if the shepherd boy learned his lesson. This story is good incentive for truth-telling because of the consequences that befall the liar. But the Christian loves the truth because Jesus proclaimed Himself to be the way, the truth, and the life. It is not just about consequences.

“The Wind and the Sun” is an unusual fable whose characters are neither animals nor humans, but elements of nature. In this fable, the wind and the sun have a contest to see who can get a traveler to take off his coat. Never mind that the wind was at a serious disadvantage to start with because windy weather seldom causes one to take off a coat, but nevertheless, he blew up quite a gale, so the traveler kept his coat on tightly. Then the sun shone, the traveler got warm, and off came the coat. The moral of
the story is “Sunshine of a kind and gentle manner will sooner open a poor man’s heart than all the threats and force of blustering authority.” Of course, sometimes that may in fact be true, but it is not a universal truth. Sometimes a poor man’s heart won’t open without God’s intervention. Consider the apostle Paul, for instance. He had to be knocked off his horse and blinded!

In “The Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing” we see what happens to those who seek to deceive others: they are found out and quickly dealt with. At least in this fable that’s what happens. “Be sure your sin will find you out” (Num. 32:23) is the principle that comes to mind. The wolf dressed up like a sheep, hoping to eat a sheep for his supper, but the shepherd mistook him and killed him for his supper instead! Proverbs 26:27 says that “Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and he who rolls a stone will have it roll back on him.” It is hard not to think of the shepherd here as quite similar to the wolf: both of them just want their supper.

“The Fox and the Crow” has a very clever moral: “Whoever listens to the music of flatterers must expect to pay the piper.” In this fable we have the crow stealing some cheese and the fox stealing the stolen cheese from the crow by means of flattery. Though the fox is the winner, he is in no way the “good guy” in this exchange. The fox covets the cheese that is not his, lies to the crow, and then insults the crow after winning the cheese. But the crow’s foolishness is remarked on in the fable, not the fox’s dishonesty or thievery. It is easy to imagine a follow-up fable where the fox gets his just reward from the crow.

We will read these and a number of other fables.

Having considered all this, it is important to note that Christians can often mistake Jesus’ parables for fables. A parable (as Jesus told them), though similar in some ways to a fable, has additional subtleties and a very different point. The Harper Handbook to Literature defines a parable in a way that is too similar to their definition of fable—a “short tale encapsulating a moral or religious lesson.” The New Geneva Study Bible note on Matthew 13:3 has this to say about Jesus’ parables: “Most of Jesus’ parables are clear, but they also contain a depth of meaning that only one with a right relationship to Jesus can comprehend. It is only to the disciples that Jesus gives the
interpretation of the parable of the sower and the parable of the tares. The ungodly miss this deeper meaning because their lack of a proper relationship with God has darkened their thoughts and hearts.” In addition to this, Christ’s parables were more context-dependent. Aesop’s fables bring their own context with them; they are universally accessible. Christ’s parables often function well at the same level (treated as a fable), but if we stop there, we will miss a great deal.

Jesus’ parables were not just giving little morals like a fable, but were actually prophetic pronouncements against Israel. Consider, for example, the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard in Matthew 20:1–16. In this parable some workers come early in the morning and others arrive shortly before the end of the day, but they are all paid the same amount for their labor. If we are just looking for a simple moral, we might say, “Be content with your pay” or “Don’t compare yourselves to others” or “An employer can overpay his workers if he wants.” These are all good lessons, and so the story could work as a didactic lesson. But Jesus was speaking about Israel and the Gentiles. The Jews had been “working in the vineyard” for many centuries, serving God, obeying His law, and worshiping Him as He commanded. Then along came Jesus preaching the Good News, with the intent to include even the Gentiles and other sinners within Israel. And the Jews were grumbling. How could God give the kingdom to the latecomers, those who had not been working all day? This is a good example of how we can mistake the message of God’s abundant grace and just get some good moral instruction from the parable instead.

A modern fabulist would be someone like Dr. Seuss. If you have read stories such as The Sneetches or Horton Hears a Who, you know he is using funny animals to teach moral lessons to children about how to treat one another, about the foolishness of competition and peer pressure, and the importance of standing up for the little guy. These are fables, not parables, but because he lived thousands of years after the Incarnation, Dr. Seuss understands something of grace. He sees the goodness of the self-sacrificing Horton who is persecuted by his community. Perhaps the difference between Seuss and Aesop is that Aesop’s Fables originated in the darkness of ancient Greece before the advent of the gospel, while Dr. Seuss was writing in the light of the Christian era.

By bringing Scripture to bear on these fables, I am not trying to undermine their purpose of teaching or their ability to delight us. We ought to take them as they are intended and enjoy them. But this enjoyment should only be as far as they go. So, if you have the opportunity, look at some children’s editions of the stories and check out a couple of the cartoon versions.

—Nancy Wilson

For Further Reading


SESSION I: PRELUDE

A Question to Consider

If fables are not factually possible (animals do not speak—the serpent in the Garden and Balaam's ass excepted), why should we read them?

From the General Information above, answer the following questions:
1. Why do the fables have such a universal appeal?
2. What is the relationship of law and grace for Christians?
3. What is the relationship of law and grace in Aesop?
4. Does this reliance on law mean that Christians cannot enjoy Aesop?
5. What common mistake do we make with regard to the parables of Christ?
6. What is significant about the use of animals in Aesop?

READING ASSIGNMENT:

SESSION II: DISCUSSION

“The Fox and the Grapes,” “The Ants and the Grasshopper”

A Question to Consider

When we hear a “poor loser” make up excuses for why he lost or didn't get his way, why does it bother us so much? What is a typical fleshly response to defeat?

Discuss or list short answers to the following questions:

Text Analysis
1. In “The Fox and the Grapes,” what condition is the fox in at the beginning of the fable? Might this condition affect his attitude to some degree? If so, how?
2. In “The Fox and the Grapes,” how does the fox respond to defeat?
3. In “The Ants and the Grasshopper,” how do the ants first respond to the half-dead grasshopper’s request for “a morsel to save his life”?
4. In “The Ants and the Grasshopper,” at any point in the fable do the ants show compassion or have mercy on the grasshopper?
5. In “The Ants and the Grasshopper,” the moral of the fable is “Idleness brings want,” which applies to the grasshopper’s situation. What might the moral be if it were to apply to the ants?

Cultural Analysis
1. Where do we see “sour grapes” attitudes in our culture?
2. How does our culture react to people claiming “sour grapes”?
3. Where do we see sluggardly behavior in our culture?
4. How does our culture react to sluggardly behavior?

Biblical Analysis
1. How does the fox’s response compare with Proverbs 21:23–24?
2. What does Luke 6:44–46 say about this sort of response?
3. What connection do we see between the fox’s heart and mouth (Matt. 12:34)?
4. The Scriptures paint a very clear picture of how the sluggard is to look to the ant and learn from her ways. How is the grasshopper an excellent illustration of Proverbs 6:6–11?
5. In this passage, how does the ant fall short of a Christian response to poverty?

SUMMA
Write an essay or discuss this question, integrating what you have learned from the material above.

What is a Christian reaction to “sour grapes” and sluggardly behavior?

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Narrative Mime

Let’s bring this fable to life with a narrative mime! While the teacher reads the following adaptation of “The Fox and the Grapes,” the students act out the role of the fox without speaking. Be sure not to read too quickly. The students need time to mime all of the actions. There are no “physical” props…everything is mimed. Have fun!

Our next session will be a student-led discussion. As you are reading the following assignment, you should write down at least three questions from the text dealing with the issue listed below. These questions will be turned in to the teacher and will be used in classroom discussion. To get full credit for these Text Analysis questions, you must create a question that is connected to the reading and to the issue that is the focus of our discussion; you must also answer the
question correctly (and include a page or line reference at the end); and your question must be one that invites discussion and debate (“why” questions are excellent; questions that can be answered by “yes” or “no” are to be avoided).

You should also provide two Cultural Analysis and two Biblical Analysis questions. Cultural Analysis questions ask how our culture views the issue that we are discussing. Biblical Analysis questions ask what the Bible says concerning this issue. Again, to get full credit for each question, you must create questions connected to the issue we are studying, answer each question correctly, and create questions that encourage and invite discussion and exploration. For an example of each type of question and answer, refer to the example provided in the next session.

If you are working alone, after creating your questions and answers, have your parent or tutor check over them. Also, if possible, share them with your family at the dinner table, helping them to understand why the issue is important, how the issue arises in your reading, how its importance is still evident in our culture, and how understanding this issue might change the way you and your family should think and live.

**Issue**

Wolves almost always appear in fables as villains. Is this consistent portrayal of wolves good or is this just a prejudice?

**Reading Assignment:**


“Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep?”

Proverbs 6:6–9

**Session III: Student-Led Discussion**


**A Question to Consider**

Wolves almost always appear in fables as villains. Is this consistent portrayal of wolves good, or is this just a prejudice?

Students should read and consider the example questions below that are connected to the Question to Consider above. Last session’s assignment was to prepare three questions and answers for the Text Analysis section and two additional questions and answers for both the Cultural and Biblical Analysis sections below.

**Text Analysis**

*Example:* Do wolves have a fixed nature in *Aesop’s Fables* or are there all sorts of different wolves?

*Answer:* We see a clear pattern as to the wolf’s fixed nature. There is not a single fable that paints the wolf as being an honorable, merciful character. We see this in the world as well. Since the wolves are known for being cunning, liars, thieves, deceivers, bullies, and tyrants, we also know that the wolf will not choose a respectable way to “earn a living.” We need to keep in mind that this fable illustrates a simple truth about life as far as it goes. It’s simply showing that a liar lies, a thief steals, a deceiver deceives, and so on. It doesn’t go the extra step in showing that God can change hearts and forgive those who repent.

**Cultural Analysis**

*Example:* Where do we see the twisting of symbolic language in our culture today?

*Answer:* We often see it in children’s books and cartoons. Dragons and snakes and ghouls are often portrayed as kind, nice, heroic and all-around good or at least vastly misunderstood.

Other cultural issues to consider: *Dragontales, Super Why, Beetlejuice*

**Biblical Analysis**

*Example:* Are dragons and snakes ever
“How is it, my good friend . . .” The town mouse persuasively and convincingly tells the country mouse that he truly cannot prefer his country way of life over that of town. You live like a toad in a hole. You can’t really prefer these solitary rocks and woods to streets teeming with carriages and people. Upon my word of honor, you’re wasting your time in such a miserable existence. You must make the most of your life while it lasts. As you know, a mouse does not live forever. So, come with me this very night, and I’ll show you all around the town and what life’s about.” Several things can be gleaned from this conversation: The town mouse is the country mouse’s good friend. Because of this relationship, the country mouse values the opinion of his friend. He trusts him.

How is it, my good friend . . .

The town mouse uses the “sense of urgency” to convince the country mouse that he needs to make a life change.

You live like a toad in a hole. You can’t really prefer these solitary rocks and woods . . .

The town mouse very confidently and unapologetically gives the country mouse counsel as to how he needs to change his country way of life for his own good.

Upon my word of honor, you’re wasting your time in such a miserable existence.

The town mouse uses the “sense of urgency” to convince the country mouse that he needs to make a life change.

Let’s look at the after-dinner chat between the town mouse and country mouse. The town mouse says, “How is it, my good friend, that you can endure this boring and crude life? You live like a toad in a hole. You can’t really prefer these solitary rocks and woods to streets teeming with carriages and people. Upon my word of honor, you’re wasting your time in such a miserable existence. You must make the most of your life while it lasts. As you know, a mouse does not live forever. So, come with me this very night, and I’ll show you all around the town and what life’s about.” Several things can be gleaned from this conversation: The town mouse is the country mouse’s good friend. Because of this relationship, the country mouse values the opinion of his friend. He trusts him.

How is it, my good friend . . .

The town mouse persuasively and convincingly tells the country mouse that he truly cannot prefer his country way of life over that of town.

You live like a toad in a hole. You can’t really prefer these solitary rocks and woods . . .

The town mouse very confidently and unapologetically gives the country mouse counsel as to how he needs to change his country way of life for his own good.

Upon my word of honor, you’re wasting your time in such a miserable existence.

The town mouse uses the “sense of urgency” to convince the country mouse that he needs to make a life change.

Several things can be gleaned from this conversation:

- The town mouse is the country mouse’s good friend. Because of this relationship, the country mouse values the opinion of his friend. He trusts him.

- How is it, my good friend . . .

- The town mouse persuasively and convincingly tells the country mouse that he truly cannot prefer his country way of life over that of town.

- You live like a toad in a hole. You can’t really prefer these solitary rocks and woods . . .

- The town mouse very confidently and unapologetically gives the country mouse counsel as to how he needs to change his country way of life for his own good.

- Upon my word of honor, you’re wasting your time in such a miserable existence.

- The town mouse uses the “sense of urgency” to convince the country mouse that he needs to make a life change.
You must make the most of your life while it lasts. . . . [A] mouse does not live forever. Come with me this very night . . .

The town mouse portrays himself as being an expert in knowing what life is all about.

. . . I'll show you all around the town and what life's about (the essence of the entire discourse).

Though the town mouse believes that what he is saying is true, his words are tempting, deceptive and false and will lead his friend astray.

**List of Characters**

Narrators: One or more
Birds, Cows, Trees
Country Mouse
Town Mouse
Revelers
Dogs

**Set/Props**

For Country Mouse’s home use one chair to represent rocking chair. Two chairs and a small table can be used to represent the kitchen. For Town Mouse’s home two chairs and a table can be used to represent the dining room.

**Sound-Effects**

Use the voice to create birds tweeting, trees blowing and whistling, a telephone ringing, cows mooing, a roaring car engine, and traffic noises. Use bells for a telephone ringing, along with a triangle for the elevator going up and down, stopping at each floor.

**Staging**

Use one half of the stage/room for the country mouse’s house, and the other half for the town mouse’s house. As the mice travel from one home to the other, they could drive their car around the edge of the stage/classroom.

**Reading Assignment:**

“*The Hare and the Tortoise,*” “*The Hares and the Frogs,*” “*The Farmer and the Stork,*” “*The Man and the Lion,*” “*The Bundle of Sticks,*” “*Jupiter and the Bee,*” “*Mercury and the Woodcutter,*” and “*The Goose with the Golden Eggs*”

Benjamin Franklin once said, “A wolf eats sheep but now and then, ten thousands are devoured by men.” In fables wolves are almost always depicted as villains.
Extending the Story

This session is a writing assignment. Remember, quality counts more than quantity. You should write no more than 1,000 words, either typing or writing legibly on one side of a sheet of paper. You will lose points for writing more than this. You will be allowed to turn in your writing three times. The first and second times you turn it in, your teacher will grade it by editing your work. This is done by marking problem areas and making suggestions for improvement. You should take these suggestions into consideration as you revise your assignment. Only the grade on your final submission will be recorded. Your grade will be based on the following criteria: 25 points for grammar, 25 points for content accuracy—historical, theological, etc.; 25 points for logic—does this make sense and is it structured well?; 25 points for rhetoric—is it a joy to read?

Fictional Story

Your assignment is to extend or lengthen the story of “The Tortoise and the Hare” by imagining what would happen after the race is over. “The Tortoise and the Hare” is one of Aesop’s most popular fables. We tend to think of it as being a fable for children since it is so often adapted for children’s books and movies. It points out how the proud and boastful hare loses in a race against a slow but steady tortoise. Though the hare has the ability to win the race, he makes an arrogant decision to stop and rest, which enables the tortoise to pass him by and win. The tortoise is an excellent example of one who perseveres until the end. Thus, we have the moral “Slow and steady wins the race.” Have you ever wondered what happened after the race? Was the hare a “bad loser” or did he learn his lesson? Was there ever a rematch? Wonder no more. A new, extended version of this fable answers all your questions.

“The Tortoise and the Hare … Extended Edition”
Author Unknown

Once upon a time a tortoise and a hare had an argument about who was faster. They decided to settle the argument with a race. The tortoise and hare both agreed on a route and started off the race. The hare shot ahead and ran briskly for some time. Then seeing that he was far ahead of the tortoise, he thought he’d sit under a tree for some time and relax before continuing the race. He sat under the tree and soon fell asleep. The tortoise, plodding on, overtook him and soon finished the race, emerging as the undisputed champ. The hare woke up and realized that he’d lost the race.

The moral of the story is that slow and steady wins the race. This is the version of the story that we’ve all grown up with.

But the story doesn’t end there…

Here is an example of what the rest of the “Extended Edition” might look like. (This version is written to affirm certain business principles. It is used by professionals as a tool to teach teamwork throughout the English-speaking world and beyond. In addition to the United States and Canada, this version is popular in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, China, Hong Kong, India, Korea, Japan, Jamaica, Saudi Arabia, Croatia, and the list goes on. Some or all of the morals are focused on the business world.)

The hare was disappointed at losing the race and he did some soul-searching. He realized that he’d lost the race only because he had been overconfident, careless, and lax. If he had not taken things for granted, there’s no way the tortoise could have beaten him. So he challenged the tortoise to another race. The tortoise agreed. This time, the hare went all out and ran without stopping from start to finish. He won by several miles.

The moral of the story? Fast and consistent will always beat the slow and steady. If you have two people in your organization, one slow, methodical and reliable, and the other fast and still reliable at what he does, the fast and reliable chap will consistently climb the organizational ladder faster than the slow, methodical chap.

It’s good to be slow and steady, but it’s better to be fast and reliable.

But the story doesn’t end there…
The tortoise did some thinking this time, and realized that there’s no way he can beat the hare in a race the way it was currently formatted. He thought for a while, and then challenged the hare to another race, but on a slightly different route. The hare agreed. The tortoise and hare started off. In keeping with his self-made commitment to be consistently fast, the hare took off and ran at top speed until he came to a broad river. The finishing line was a couple of kilometers on the other side of the river. The hare sat there wondering what to do. In the meantime the tortoise trundled along, got into the river, swam to the opposite bank, continued walking and finished the race.

The moral of the story? First identify your core competency and then change the playing field to suit your core competency.

In an organization, if you are a good speaker, make sure you create opportunities to give presentations that enable the senior management to notice you. If your strength is analysis, make sure you do some sort of research, make a report and send it upstairs. Working to your strengths will not only get you noticed, but will also create opportunities for growth and advancement.

The story still hasn’t ended.

The tortoise and hare, by this time, had become pretty good friends, and they did some thinking together. Both realized that the last race could have been run much better. So the tortoise and hare decided to do the last race again, but to run as a team this time. They started off, and this time the hare carried the tortoise till the riverbank. There, the tortoise took over and swam across with the hare on his back. On the opposite bank, the hare again carried the tortoise, and they reached the finishing line together. Both the tortoise and hare felt a greater sense of satisfaction than they’d felt earlier.

The moral of the story? It’s good to be individually brilliant and to have strong core competencies, but unless you’re able to work in a team and harness each other’s core competencies, you’ll always perform below par because there will always be situations at which you’ll do poorly and someone else does well.

Teamwork is mainly about situational leadership, letting the person with the relevant core competency for a situation take leadership.

There are more lessons to be learned from this inspirational teamwork story.

Note that neither the tortoise nor hare gave up after failures. The hare decided to work harder and put in more effort after his failure. The tortoise changed his strategy because he was already working as hard as he could. In life, when faced with failure, sometimes it is appropriate to work harder and put in more effort. Sometimes it is appropriate to change strategy and try something different. And sometimes it is appropriate to do both.

The tortoise and hare also learned another vital lesson in teamwork. When we stop competing against a rival and instead start competing against the situation, we perform far better.

For example, when Roberto Goizueta took over as chief executive officer of Coca-Cola in the 1980s, he was faced with intense competition from Pepsi that was eating into Coke’s growth. His executives were Pepsi-focused and intent on increasing market share 0.1 percent. Goizueta decided to stop competing against Pepsi and instead compete against the situation of 0.1 percent growth.

He asked his executives what was the average fluid intake of an American per day. The answer was 14 ounces. What was Coke’s share of that? Two ounces. Goizueta said Coke needed a larger share of that market. The competition wasn’t Pepsi. It was the water, tea, coffee, milk, and fruit juices that went into the remaining 12 ounces. To this end, Coke put up vending machines at every street corner. Sales took a quantum jump, and Pepsi has never quite caught up since.

To sum up, the story of the hare and tortoise teaches us many things. Chief among them are that fast and consistent will always beat slow and steady; work to your competencies; pooling resources and working as a team will always beat individual performers; never give up when faced with failure; and finally, compete against the situation, not against a rival.

Reading Assignment:

Session VI: Activity
Creating an Oral Fable

In the true spirit of Aesop, we are going to create an oral fable. In addition to being a great learning experience, this exercise is a lot of fun! An important factor to making this a success is to do a thorough job creating the storyline. The more information you have, the better the oral fable will be!

Copy the headings from Chart 1 onto a large sheet of paper or the board. Fill in the information. Remember, the moral drives the storyline. The storyline is simply the...
tool used to drive the point home.

Sit in a large circle. (If you are working at home, do this activity with family members. If you are working alone, write the fable and present it to your family at dinner.) Pass around a “talking stick” (any simple item, such as an eraser, ruler or ball). The person holding the “talking stick” adds a line or two to the oral fable being created. The last one holding the “talking stick” tells the moral of the story. Encourage the students to include creative dialogue! (Each student may contribute to the story one or several times depending upon the size of the class.)

Here is an example of what you might produce:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Whoever harms his neighbor will bring a curse upon himself.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Little friends may prove great friends.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Never underestimate the help of the small.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| General plot | Characters “A” and “B” are walking down the road. “B” falls into a pit. “A” runs away, leaving “B” in the pit. “C” comes upon “B” in the pit and rescues him. “C” invites “B” to his home for dinner and lodging. The next day “B” and “C” come upon “A” captured in a drop-net trap. “B” and “C” do not rescue “A.” |

| Select characters whose characteristics are appropriate for the plot. | Character “A”: a fox; Character “B”: an old hound; Character “C”: a mouse |

| Additional storyline details: Setting, Relationships, Motives, Outcome (can be completed in any order) | Setting: Summertime on a forest path just as the sun is setting. Shadows are covering the ground. It is the middle of the night when the mouse helps the old hound. It is mid-morning when the old hound and mouse come upon the fox.

Relationships: The fox and the old hound with poor eyesight meet earlier that day on the road. They realize they are both traveling in the same direction and decide to travel together. The forest dwelling mouse doesn’t know either the fox or the old hound.

Motives: The fox knows the old hound has poor eyesight and that a pit lies on their path. The fox wants the old hound’s travel pack which contains food and money. The mouse has no ulterior motive. He shows kindness to the old hound. The old hound and mouse do not rescue the fox because he showed no mercy to the old hound.

Outcome: The old hound retrieves his travel pack and continues his journey accompanied by the mouse. The fox is captured by hunters. |
Once upon a time there was a possum and a field mouse. The possum thought little of the field mouse because he was so tiny, but the field mouse desperately wanted to be friends with the possum. “What can a field mouse do?” asked the possum sarcastically as he strode away from the friendless mouse into the deep dark woods. That night some hunters were in the woods and saw the possum. He scurried away. But just when he thought he was safe, he stumbled into a patch of vines and was trapped. Soon the hunters would find him, kill him, and have him for dinner. Along came the listless field mouse, who saw the possum trapped and heard the hunters coming. He quickly ran to where the possum was trapped and began to gnaw at the vines that held him fast. The last vine snapped seconds before the hunters arrived, and the possum and the field mouse darted into a hollow tree for safety. The possum looked at his tiny friend with gratitude. “Little friends may prove great friends,” he said.

Optional Activity

A great way to practice rhetoric skills while applying what the students have learned about Aesop is to host an Aesop’s Fables production! Invite parents, siblings, and younger students.

Aesop was a master storyteller. He was known for his quick wit and his ability to captivate and entertain large audiences. Captivate your audience! In honor of Aesop, be energetic, witty, and creative. Leave a lasting impression on your audience. Have fun!

Below is a sample 30-minute performance schedule. If time permits, add more to the schedule. For example:

- Add a reading of the original “The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf” as well as a rewrite.
- Read an Aesop’s fable but don’t include the moral. Call on audience members to share what they think a fitting moral might be. End with reading the real moral.
- If the audience is composed of older students and parents, include a reading of “The Tortoise and the Hare . . . Extended Edition.”

Sample Performance Schedule

- Present a brief background of Aesop.
- Do a brief introduction of “The Wind and the Sun.” Perform the play (make it like the one you did for “The Country Mouse and the City Mouse.”

Following the performance, expand upon the moral by adding that in some instances we need more than a kind word to open a poor man’s heart. We need God’s intervention.

- Read the original version of “The Ants and the Grasshopper.” Explain how this fable shows all law and no mercy.
- Read one rewrite of “The Ants and the Grasshopper” and explain how it demonstrates mercy.
- Do a brief introduction of “The Country Mouse and the Town Mouse.” Perform the play.
- End with the actors and audience members participating in a mime of “The Fox and the Grapes.” (See the Optional Activity for Session II.)

Optional Session: Recitation

Comprehension Questions

Answer the following questions for factual recall:

1. Looking at the fable “The Country Mouse and the City Mouse,” at what point do you notice that the country mouse is finding the town mouse’s living situation more agreeable than his own? What is the country mouse’s initial attitude toward this “positive” change in his living situation?
2. In “The Country Mouse and the City Mouse,” after spending some time in the “lap of luxury,” the country mouse goes through a transformation. What seed has sprouted and is growing in the country mouse’s heart, which affects his attitude and thoughts?
3. What actions occurred that brought the country mouse back to his senses?
4. In “The Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing,” why did the wolf dress up like a sheep in the first place?
5. In “The Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing,” are the wolf and shepherd really so different?
6. In “The Fox and the Crow,” can you think of an instance in your life where you listened to smooth talking and ended up “paying the piper”?
7. In “The Wind and the Sun,” we see that the sunshine of a kind and gentle manner will sooner open a poor man’s heart than all the threats and force of blustering authority. Do you agree or disagree with the moral? Why?

Endnote

1 There are a number of online sources for Aesop. For starters try http://www.mythfolklore.net/aesopica.