



Aesop's Fables

Thirty classic tales to read, hear, and talk about

CLASSIC STORY SHELF · THE ACTIVE HOME

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The Tortoise and the Hare



A hare liked to brag about how fast he could run.
"Nobody can beat me," he said.

A slow old tortoise heard him. "I will race you," said the tortoise. The animals laughed, but they all lined up at the start. "Go!" hooted the owl.



The hare zoomed far ahead. He looked back and saw the tortoise was only a tiny speck. "I have plenty of time," he yawned, and he lay down under a tree for a nap.

The tortoise kept walking, one slow step after another, and he never stopped. When the hare woke up, he ran as fast as he could. But it was too late. The tortoise was already crossing the finish line, and all the animals cheered.

Lesson: Slow and steady wins the race.

Words to know: **brag** — to talk proudly about yourself · **speck** — a very small spot

The Lion and the Mouse



A lion was sleeping in the shade when a little mouse ran across his nose. The lion woke with a roar and caught her in his big paw.

"Please let me go," squeaked the mouse. "Someday I may help you." The lion laughed. "How could a tiny mouse help a lion?" But he let her go.



A few days later, hunters trapped the lion in a strong net. He roared and roared, but he could not get free.

The mouse heard him and hurried over. She chewed through the ropes with her sharp little teeth until the lion was free. "You laughed at me," she said, "but now you see that even a small friend can be a big help."

Lesson: Kindness is never wasted, and small friends can be a big help.

Words to know: **trapped** — caught so you cannot leave · **squeaked** — made a high, tiny sound

The Boy Who Cried Wolf



A shepherd boy watched the village sheep on a hill. Each day was long and boring.

One afternoon he shouted, "Wolf! Wolf! A wolf is chasing the sheep!" The villagers ran up the hill with sticks. There was no wolf. The boy laughed at them.



The next day he did it again. Again the villagers ran, and again there was no wolf. This time they were angry.

Then one evening a real wolf crept out of the woods. "Wolf! Wolf!" cried the boy. "Please help me!" But nobody came. They thought it was another trick. By morning, the sheep were scattered, and the boy had learned a hard lesson.

Lesson: If you tell lies, people will not believe you, even when you tell the truth.

Words to know: **shepherd** — a person who looks after sheep · **scattered** — spread out in many directions

The Fox and the Grapes



One hot day, a hungry fox walked through an orchard. High up on a vine hung a bunch of ripe, purple grapes.

"Those look delicious," said the fox. He jumped, but he could not reach them. He jumped again, higher, and missed. He tried a third time and fell flat on his back.



The fox sat for a moment and looked at the grapes. Then he stood up, brushed off his fur, and held his nose in the air.

"I did not want those grapes anyway," he said. "I am sure they are sour." And he trotted away.

Lesson: It is easy to say we do not want something when we cannot get it.

Words to know: **orchard** — a place where fruit trees grow
· **ripe** — ready to eat

The Ant and the Grasshopper



All summer long, a grasshopper hopped through the meadow, singing and playing. "Come and play with me!" he called to an ant.

The ant was carrying a grain of corn. "I cannot," she said. "I am storing food for winter. You should too." The grasshopper laughed. "Winter is far away!"



When winter came, snow covered the meadow. The grasshopper was cold and very hungry. He knocked on the ant's door.

"Could you share some food?" he asked. The ant gave him a little and said, "Next summer, remember to get ready while the sun is warm." And the grasshopper did.

Lesson: Get ready today for what you will need tomorrow.

Words to know: **meadow** — a field of grass and flowers · **storing** — saving for later

The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse



A country mouse invited his cousin from the town to dinner. He served plain barley and beans, and they ate by the quiet fields.

"This is very simple," said the town mouse. "Come home with me and see how we live!"



In the town house, the table was covered with cheese, cake, and fruit. But just as they began to eat, a door banged open and a big cat jumped at them. The mice dashed into a crack in the wall, shaking.

The country mouse said goodbye. "You may keep your fancy feast," he said. "I would rather have plain beans in peace than cake in fear."

Lesson: Feeling safe and calm is worth more than fancy things.

Words to know: **barley** — a grain used for food · **dashed** — ran very fast

The Crow and the Pitcher



It was a very hot day, and a crow was terribly thirsty. She flew over fields and rivers, but they were all dry.

At last she found a tall pitcher with a little water at the bottom. She pushed her beak inside, but the water was too low to reach.



The crow tried to tip the pitcher over, but it was too heavy. She thought and thought. Then she saw some small pebbles on the ground.

She picked up one pebble and dropped it into the pitcher. Then another, and another. Slowly the water rose higher and higher, until the crow could take a long, cool drink.

Lesson: When you cannot do something one way, think of another way.

Words to know: **pitcher** — a tall jug for holding water · **pebbles** — small smooth stones

The Goose and the Golden Eggs



A farmer and his wife had a goose that laid one golden egg every morning. They sold the eggs and soon they were rich.

But the farmer wanted more. "One egg a day is too slow," he said. "There must be a whole pile of gold inside that goose!"



So he cut the goose open. There was no gold inside.
It was just a goose, like any other goose.

The farmer had lost his wonderful goose, and there
would be no more golden eggs.

Lesson: If you are greedy and want everything at
once, you may lose what you have.

Words to know: **greedy** — wanting much more than you
need · **rich** — having a lot of money

The Dog and His Reflection



A dog found a big juicy bone. He picked it up in his mouth and trotted home to eat it in peace.

On the way, he had to cross a narrow bridge over a stream. He looked down and saw another dog in the water. That dog had a bone too, and it looked even bigger.



"I want that one," thought the dog. He opened his mouth to snap at the other dog's bone. Splash! His own bone fell into the stream and sank out of sight.

The other dog was only his reflection. Now the dog had no bone at all, and he went home hungry.

Lesson: Be happy with what you have, or you may lose it.

Words to know: **reflection** — an image you see in water or a mirror · **stream** — a small river

The North Wind and the Sun



The North Wind and the Sun argued about which of them was stronger. Just then, a traveler came down the road wearing a warm cloak.

"Let us see who can make him take off his cloak," said the Sun. "Whoever does it is stronger."



The North Wind went first. He blew and blew with all his might. But the harder he blew, the tighter the traveler pulled his cloak around him.

Then it was the Sun's turn. She shone with a soft, warm light. Soon the traveler felt hot. He took off his cloak and sat down in the shade. The Sun had won, and she had not used force at all.

Lesson: Kindness and gentle ways work better than force.

Words to know: **traveler** — a person on a journey · **cloak** — a long coat with no sleeves

The Fox and the Crow



A crow sat in a tree with a piece of cheese in her beak. A fox walked by and smelled it. He wanted that cheese.

"Good morning, Crow," said the fox. "How lovely your feathers are! And I hear you have the sweetest voice in the forest. Will you sing for me?"



The crow felt so proud that she opened her beak to sing. Caw! The cheese dropped to the ground.

The fox snapped it up. "Thank you," he said with a grin. "Next time, remember that people who praise you too much often want something."

Lesson: Be careful of people who give you too much praise.

Words to know: **flattery** — praise that is not really meant
· **proud** — very pleased with yourself

The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing



A hungry wolf watched a flock of sheep from behind a rock. The shepherd was always nearby, so the wolf could not get close.

One day the wolf found a sheepskin on the ground. He put it on and walked quietly in among the sheep.



But the old ewe saw his sharp eyes and bleated a warning. The shepherd looked up. The sheepskin had slipped, and he could see a gray tail.

"A wolf!" shouted the shepherd. He ran at the wolf with his stick, and the wolf fled into the woods for good.

Lesson: A disguise can fool you for a while, but the truth shows up in the end.

Words to know: **flock** — a group of sheep · **disguise** — a costume to hide who you are

The Milkmaid and Her Pail



A milkmaid walked to market with a pail of fresh milk on her head. She was thinking about what she would do with the money.

"I will buy eggs," she said. "The eggs will hatch into chicks. The chicks will grow into hens, and I will sell them and buy a beautiful new dress."



"Everyone will look at me," she thought. She tossed her head proudly, just as she imagined she would at the fair.

Splash! The pail tumbled off, and all the milk spilled on the road. There was nothing left to sell.

Lesson: Do not count your chickens before they hatch.

Words to know: **pail** — a bucket with a handle · **market** — a place where people buy and sell

The Bundle of Sticks



An old farmer had several sons who quarreled all day. "He did it!" "No, you did!" The farmer was tired of the noise.

One morning he asked his sons to bring him a bundle of sticks. "Whoever can break this bundle wins a prize," he said.



Each son tried with all his strength. Not one of them could break it.

Then the farmer untied the bundle and handed out the sticks one at a time. Snap! Snap! Snap! They broke easily. "My sons," he said, "if you stick together, no one can break you."

Lesson: We are stronger when we work together.

Words to know: **quarreled** — argued angrily · **bundle** — things tied together

The Honest Woodcutter



A poor woodcutter was chopping a tree beside a river when his axe slipped from his hand and sank into the water. "That was my only axe," he cried.

Suddenly a kind river spirit appeared, holding a shining golden axe. "Is this yours?" "No," said the woodcutter. "Mine is plain."



The spirit held up a silver axe. "No, that is not mine either," he said. Then the spirit held up his old iron axe. "Yes! That one is mine!"

"You are an honest man," said the spirit. "You may keep all three axes." The woodcutter thanked him and went home happy.

Lesson: Honesty is always the best choice.

Words to know: **spirit** — a magical being · **honest** — telling the truth

The Bear and the Two Friends



Two friends were walking together through the forest. They promised to always help each other.

Suddenly a big bear came out from behind the trees. One friend ran and climbed a tree as fast as he could. He did not even look back.



The other friend could not climb. He lay very still on the ground and held his breath. The bear sniffed his ear, then wandered off into the woods.

The friend in the tree climbed down. "What did the bear whisper to you?" he asked. "He said not to trust friends who run away when there is trouble."

Lesson: A true friend stays with you when things are hard.

Words to know: **promised** — said you would surely do something · **still** — not moving

The Frog and the Ox



A little frog ran home to his mother. "I saw a huge animal at the pond!" he said. "It was as big as a mountain!" It was an ox.

"Was it this big?" asked the mother frog, puffing herself up. "Oh, much bigger!" said the little frog.



She puffed up more. "This big?" "Much, much bigger!" So she took the biggest breath she could and puffed up even more.

Pop! She burst with a loud noise. The little frogs learned that day that trying to be bigger than you are can get you in trouble.

Lesson: Do not try to be something you are not.

Words to know: **huge** — very, very big · **puffed** — blew up like a balloon

The Fox and the Stork



A fox invited a stork to dinner. He served soup in a flat dish. The stork could only dip the tip of her long beak into it. She could not drink a single sip.

The fox lapped up all the soup himself. "Dear me, do you not like my cooking?" he said, and laughed.



"Please come to dinner at my house tomorrow," said the stork politely. The next day she served a tasty stew in a tall jar with a narrow neck.

The stork dipped her long beak in and ate happily. The fox could not get his nose inside. He went home hungry. "You treated me unkindly," said the stork, "so I gave you the same."

Lesson: Treat others the way you want to be treated.

Words to know: **lapped** — drank by licking · **politely** — in a kind and respectful way

The Oak and the Reeds



A mighty oak tree stood by a river. Beside it grew thin reeds. "You poor things," the oak said. "The smallest breeze bends you over. I am strong and tall."

"We bend because we must," said the reeds. "That is how we stay safe." The oak just laughed.



That night a great storm came. The wind roared.
The oak stood stiff and straight, but the wind pulled
harder, and the oak fell into the river with a crash.

The reeds bent low and let the wind rush over them.
When the storm was over, they stood up again, as
green as before.

Lesson: Being able to bend can be stronger than
being stiff.

Words to know: **mighty** — very strong · **bend** — to curve
instead of staying straight

The Stag at the Pool



A stag came to a pool for a drink. He saw himself in the clear water. "What beautiful antlers!" he said. "But my legs are so thin and ugly."

Just then a lion sprang out from the bushes. The stag ran. His legs carried him fast, and soon he was far ahead.



But the forest grew thick. His big antlers caught in the branches, and he could not move. The lion came closer.

With one great pull, the stag broke free and bounded away to safety. "My legs saved me," he thought, "and my antlers almost caught me."

Lesson: The things we are proudest of are not always the most useful.

Words to know: **antlers** — the branching horns on a stag
· **bounded** — jumped with long leaps

Belling the Cat



The mice who lived in the big barn were tired of tiptoeing. The cat could creep so quietly that they never heard her coming. So one evening they held a meeting to make a plan.

A young mouse stood up. "I know what to do," he said. "We will tie a bell around the cat's neck. When she walks, the bell will ring, and we will all have time to run and hide."



“Hooray!” cheered the mice. “What a clever plan! No more surprises. We shall hear her coming from far away.” They danced and clapped their little paws.

Then a wise old mouse spoke up. “It is a fine plan,” he said. “But tell me — who is going to tie the bell on the cat?” The barn went very quiet. Not one mouse, big or small, was willing to creep that close to the cat.

Lesson: A plan is only a good plan if somebody is able to carry it out.

Words to know: **council** — a meeting where a group makes plans · **approach** — to come near to something

The Dog in the Manger



In a cosy barn there was a manger — a long wooden box filled with sweet hay for the oxen. One afternoon a dog crept into the barn, climbed into the manger, and curled up on the hay for a nap.

By and by the oxen came home from the fields. They had pulled the plough all day, and their tummies were rumbling. They walked to the manger for their dinner of hay.



But the dog woke up and growled. “Grrr! Keep away!” he snapped, showing his teeth. Every time an ox stepped closer, the dog barked and snapped until the ox backed away.

At last the oxen gave up and walked off, still hungry. “What a selfish dog,” said one. “He cannot eat the hay himself, and yet he will not let us eat it either.”

Lesson: It is selfish to keep others from enjoying something you cannot use yourself.

Words to know: **manger** — a long box that holds hay for farm animals · **selfish** — thinking only of yourself and not of others

The Wolf and the Crane



A wolf was gobbling his dinner too fast when — ouch! — a sharp bone got stuck in his throat. He could not swallow, and he could not cough it out. It hurt very much.

He trotted to the crane. “Please help me,” he whined. “You have a long neck and a long beak. Reach down my throat and pull the bone out, and I will give you a fine reward.”



The crane was a little afraid, but she was kind. She told the wolf to open wide, and she put her whole head into his mouth. Carefully, carefully, she gripped the bone with her beak and pulled it out.

“There!” she said. “Now, what about my reward?” The wolf just grinned and showed his teeth. “Your reward? You put your head into a wolf’s mouth and got it back again. That is reward enough!” And off he trotted, without even a thank-you.

Lesson: Do not expect thanks or rewards from someone who only thinks of himself.

Words to know: **reward** — something good given in return for help · **beak** — the hard, pointed mouth of a bird

The Two Goats



Two goats lived on the rocky sides of a deep valley. Through the bottom of the valley rushed a wild mountain stream, and the only way across was a fallen tree trunk lying from bank to bank.

One morning the two goats arrived at the log at the very same time, one at each end. The log was so narrow that even two squirrels could not have passed each other on it.



One goat stepped onto the log. The other goat stepped on too. In the middle they met, nose to nose and horn to horn. “Go back!” said the first goat. “You go back!” said the second. Neither would give way, not even a tiny step.

They butted and pushed — and splash! Both goats tumbled into the stream below. They scrambled out, wet and shivering, on the very same sides where they had started. “Next time,” said one goat, wiping water from his chin, “I shall wait my turn.”

Lesson: It is better to give way than to lose everything by being stubborn.

Words to know: stubborn — not willing to change your mind or give way · **tumble** — to fall suddenly, rolling or turning over

The Hare and the Frogs



The hares who lived in the meadow were frightened of almost everything. They were frightened of dogs and foxes, of eagles and hunters — even of the wind in the grass. “No creatures in the world are as timid as us,” they sighed.

One day they could bear it no longer. “Let us run to the pond,” they said, “and hide in the deep water, where nobody can frighten us any more.” And off they dashed, all together.



But on the bank of the pond sat a crowd of frogs, sunning themselves. When they heard the hares thundering towards them — PLOP! SPLASH! — they leaped into the water in a terrible fright and hid at the bottom.

“Stop!” cried a wise old hare. “Look at that. We thought we were the most frightened creatures in the world, but the frogs are even more frightened than we are — they are scared of us!” And the hares went home feeling much braver.

Lesson: Everyone feels afraid sometimes, and there is always someone more timid than you.

Words to know: timid — shy and easily frightened ·
startle — to surprise someone suddenly

The Fox and the Mask



One afternoon a fox slipped through an open window into the house of an actor — a man who performed in plays. The house was quiet, and the fox's nose twitched. Everything smelled interesting.

He padded into the dressing room. There were cloaks and crowns, wigs and false beards, swords made of wood, and boxes full of treasures for the stage. The fox nosed through them all.



At the bottom of a trunk, he found a mask — a splendid pretend head, painted to look exactly like a real person's face. It had rosy cheeks, bright eyes, and a noble nose. “Oh!” said the fox. “What a beautiful head!”

He turned the mask over and peeped inside. It was quite hollow and empty. The fox chuckled. “Beautiful on the outside,” he said, “but there are no brains inside at all. It is worth nothing to me.” And he trotted off to find his dinner.

Lesson: A fine outside is worth little without good sense inside.

Words to know: actor — a person who performs in plays

- **splendid** — very fine and beautiful to look at

The Gnat and the Bull



A tiny gnat had been buzzing about all morning, and his little wings were tired. Down below in the meadow he saw a great bull, grazing in the sunshine. "What a fine place to rest," he thought, and he landed on the tip of the bull's horn.

The gnat sat and sat. He watched the clouds, he watched the butterflies, and he had a pleasant little doze. The bull went on munching grass, as bulls do, without looking up once.



At last the gnat felt rested. Being a polite little fellow, he called out in his squeaky voice, “Mr. Bull! I am going now. I hope you don't mind?”

The bull slowly raised one eye. “Mind?” he rumbled. “Why, I never noticed when you came, and I shan't notice when you go.” And he went back to his grass, while the gnat flew off feeling very small indeed.

Lesson: We are not always as important as we think we are.

Words to know: **gnat** — a very tiny flying insect · **notice** — to see something or pay attention to it

The Lark and Her Young Ones



In the middle of a golden cornfield, a lark had built her nest. There she was raising her baby chicks, who peeped and rustled among the tall stalks, safe and hidden.

One day the farmer came to look at his corn. "It is ripe and yellow," he said. "I must send word to my neighbours to come and help me cut it." A little chick heard him and trembled. "Mother, Mother, must we move?" But the mother lark smiled. "No hurry, my dear. A man who waits for his friends to help him will take his time."



Some days later the farmer came again. The corn was so ripe that grains were dropping to the ground. “I can wait no longer,” he said. “Today I will hire men and we shall do the work ourselves, straight away.”

This time the mother lark did not smile. “Come, children,” she said, “we must go at once. Now the farmer means business — he is not waiting for anyone else. He is going to do it himself.” And before the men arrived, the whole family had fluttered away to a safe new home.

Lesson: If you want something done, the surest way is to do it yourself.

Words to know: reap — to cut and gather a ripe crop ·
ripe — fully grown and ready to pick or cut

The Wolf and the Lamb



A little lamb had strayed away from her flock and was sipping the cool water of a stream. Out of the trees crept a hungry wolf. He wanted his dinner, but first he thought he would find an excuse to blame the lamb.

“You there!” growled the wolf. “Last year you were very rude to me.” “Oh no, sir,” bleated the lamb. “That cannot have been me. I wasn't born last year.” “Well then,” said the wolf, “you eat the grass in my fields.” “I can't, sir,” said the lamb. “I have never eaten grass. I still drink my mother's milk.”



“Then you drink from my spring!” snapped the wolf. “No, sir,” said the lamb, trembling. “This is the stream, and it is the first drink I have ever had away from home.” Every excuse the wolf made up, the lamb answered truly and politely.

“Then I shall have my dinner anyway!” howled the wolf, and he sprang. But the lamb was quick! She darted between his paws and raced back to the flock as fast as her legs could carry her. The shepherd's dog barked, the shepherd waved his stick, and the wolf slunk away into the trees with no dinner at all.

Lesson: A bully can always invent an excuse, so be quick, be brave, and run to safety.

Words to know: **stray** — to wander away from the group you belong with · **excuse** — a reason someone gives to explain or blame something

The Fox and the Goat



A fox was trotting through the woods when — splash! — he fell right into a deep old well. The walls were steep and slippery, and try as he might, he could not climb out.

After a while, a thirsty goat came wandering by and peered over the edge. “Is the water good down there?” he called. “Good?” cried the fox, thinking quickly. “It is the sweetest, coolest water I have ever tasted! Come down and try it!”



The goat thought of nothing but his thirst, and — splash! — he jumped in too. When he had drunk his fill, he looked up. “How do we get out?” he asked. “Easy,” said the fox. “Stand up tall on your back legs and put your front legs on the wall. I will climb onto your back, step onto your horns, and jump out. Then I will pull you up.”

The goat did as he was told, and in a flash the fox was out of the well — and trotting away! “You promised to help me!” bleated the goat. The fox only laughed and called back, “You should have looked for a way out before you jumped in!” Luckily the farmer heard the goat's cries and pulled him out

with a rope. And the goat never jumped anywhere again without looking first.

Lesson: Look before you leap — think first, and make sure you can get out before you jump in.

Words to know: **well** — a deep hole dug in the ground to reach water · **leap** — to jump a long way

About this book

All thirty fables are attributed to Aesop and are many centuries old, so they are in the public domain. These retellings, and the illustrations, are original to The Active Home.

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