

**THEATRE
RESOURCE GUIDE**

Aesop's Fables

adapted for the stage by **Seth Kaltwasser**
featuring poetry of **Jean de La Fontaine**
directed by **Andrew Benson**



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Using this theatre resource guide

This theatre resource guide for *Aesop's Fables* is designed to be used with students before and after attending the Festival Theatre production. The guide includes information and activities that will increase student understanding of this and other theatrical performances. You may reproduce any and all of the following pages to distribute to students or parents.

Fables & Aesop Page 3

This page familiarizes students with the literary genre of fables and the history of Aesop's stories.

Who will you meet in Aesop's Forest? Page 4

This page familiarizes students with the main characters of the play.

From the Page to the Stage Page 5

The information on this page explains the relationship of the play to the original story it was based on.

Staging the Story Page 6

This page contains information about theatre in *Aesop's Fables* and encourages students to engage in creative problem-solving in relation to staging the play.

Lines of Dialogue Page 7

This activity page provides dialogue from the script and involves students in experimenting with different ways to speak or "deliver" characters' lines.

The Part That YOU Play Page 8

This page reminds students of their role as audience members, stressing the importance of listening carefully and responding appropriately. Post-performance discussion questions are also included.

FABLES & AESOP

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What is a Fable?

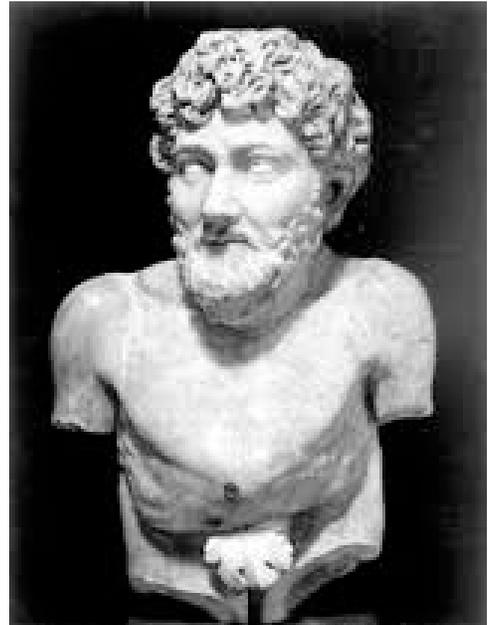
A fable is a short story which illustrates a particular moral and teaches a lesson. The stories are often humorous and entertaining for people of all ages. Fables can also be described as "tales" or "yarns" or "parables". Many times, fables can become myths and legends.

Who is Aesop?

Very little is known about Aesop, the original author of these fables. He is believed to have lived in Greece around 620 to 560 B.C. Some historians say he was a slave and others say he was a royal advisor, but the facts may always remain a bit of a mystery. Even though no one really knows the story of Aesop's life, his stories have been cherished and shared for centuries!

Aesop's Fables have been kept alive hundreds of years by the art of storytelling. The fables have continued to be told because they are fairly short and simple, but features lots of fun characters (foxes and lions and donkeys – and more!) and they always end with an important lesson.

There are more than 600 fables by Aesop! In the play, you will see some of the most famous stories from that enormous collection.



Which of the following fables have you heard before?

The Story:

The Tortoise & The Hare

The Sick Lion

The Donkey in Lion's Skin

Mercury & The Woodman

The Moral:

Slow & steady wins the race!

Learn from the mistakes of others.

Clothes don't make the man; the things we do and say every day matter.

Honesty is the best policy.

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WHO WILL YOU MEET IN AESOP'S FOREST?

The stage version of Aesop's Fables is set on a Greek island called Samos. On this page, you can get to know some of the important characters from the play.

Aesop. In our play, Aesop is still a young person and he doesn't know how to discover and share a good story. In the beginning, he is quiet and shy, but by the end of the play he will have many stories to tell.

Aesop is...timid, curious & learning.

Xanthus. Xanthus is Aesop's friend. She lives on the island of Samos and introduces Aesop to many of the interesting animals in the forest.

Xanthus is...intelligent & brave.

Fox. The Fox is a very sneaky animal. She is always playing tricks on her friends and she often finds herself getting into trouble.

Fox is...sly & silly.

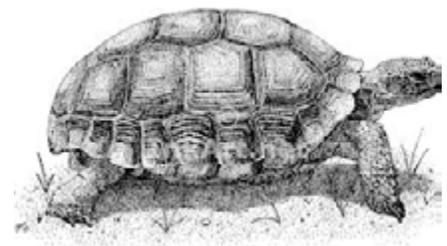


Lion. The Lion thinks of himself as the King of the Beasts, but sometimes this pride ends up getting the better of him!

Lion is...proud & competitive.

Tortoise. The Tortoise doesn't talk much. She keeps to herself, but she is very dependable. She always finishes what she starts.

Tortoise is...quiet & reliable.



Donkey. Even if the Donkey isn't the fastest or the strongest or the smartest animal in the forest, she is a good friend to have. She is very friendly and she's always looking for an adventure.

Donkey is...fun-loving & friendly.

FROM THE PAGE TO THE STAGE

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Jean de La Fontaine

Jean de La Fontaine was a 17th century French poet whose famous retellings of Aesop's Fables will be showcased in the play. As you watch the play, see if you can spot Jean de La Fontaine's writing!

Here's one of Jean de La Fontaine's poems! As you read this, imagine how you could act this poem out on stage.



The Crow & The Fox

Master Crow sat on a tree,
Holding a cheese in his beak.
Master Fox was attracted by the odor,
And tried to attract him thus.
"Mister Crow, good day to you.
You are a handsome and good looking bird!
In truth, if your song is as beautiful as your plumage,
You are the Phoenix of this forest."
Hearing these words the Crow felt great joy,
And to demonstrate his beautiful voice,
He opened his mouth wide and let drop his prey.
The Fox seized it and said: "My good Sir,
Know that every flatterer,
Lives at the expense of those who take him seriously:
This is a lesson that is worth a cheese no doubt."

The Crow, embarrassed and confused,
Swore, though somewhat later, that he would never be
tricked thus again.

Questions:

Who are the different characters in this story?

Can you figure out what happens?

What is the lesson of this fable?

6 STAGING THE STORY

When you attend a play, you agree to pretend. You agree to “suspend disbelief”, to pretend that the stage action and characters are real. To present a story on stage, actors and other theatre artists often rely on theatre customs. These customs, or conventions, are accepted ways of acting or doing something on stage. In **Aesop's Fables**, watch for the following theatre conventions:



Actors playing multiple roles.

Sometimes, the same actor will play different characters. The audience understands that they're seeing a different character because the actor has changed a costume piece or the way their voice sounds.

Changes in light to illustrate passage of time or change of location.

The entire play takes place in a forest, but sometimes the characters travel to different parts of the forest, and the play shows an entire day over just a period of about 80 minutes. A change in the special theatre lighting helps the audience to understand these shifts.

Sound effects to paint large pictures.

At one point in the play, a large tree is supposed to fall down. Our director and stage manager designed sound effects so that we can “hear” the tree, even if can't visually show that on stage.

To present these stories on stage, the actors and other theatre artists must solve a lot of problems. Here are some problems that had to be solved for *Aesop's Fables*. How might you solve them? In your answers, you may use lights, costumes, set pieces, sound effects, music, props, or actors.

Problem 1: How do you show many different types of animals - from small tortoises to big lions - on the stage with a bunch of human actors?

Problem 2: How do you make a flat stage look like a forest full of trees?

Problem 3: How can you show a river on stage?

When you attend the play, watch for Festival Theatre's solutions to these stage problems.

LINES OF DIALOGUE

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Playwrights are people who write plays. They write lines of dialogue for the actors to speak. The dialogue gives information about the story and the characters.

Read the lines of dialogue from *Aesop's Fables* printed here. What do they tell you about the story and characters?

Actors experiment with different ways to say or “deliver” their lines. Work with a partner. Try delivering these characters’ lines in different ways (boldly, fearfully, proudly, sadly, etc.)

Which line deliveries do you like best? Why?

When you attend *Aesop's Fables*, listen for these lines and for how the actors deliver them.

Group One:

1 **Donkey:** You don't have to run so fast. You practically knocked us over.
Fox: Well, maybe you should get out of the fast lane.

Group Two:

2 **Fox:** Welcome to dinner, Stork!
Stork: Well, thanks for the invite! I am starving!

Group Three:

3 **Woodman:** Thank you so much. I can never repay your kindness.
Mercury: The pleasure was all mine.

Group Four:

4 **Hare:** Why did you celebrate without me?
Wolf: Well, the party started as soon as the race was finished.

Group Five:

5 **Aesop:** Did she learn her lesson?
Xanthus: We'll just have to wait and see.

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THE PART THAT YOU PLAY

Theatre Etiquette

To prepare for presenting *Aesop's Fables*, the actors memorized their lines and practiced their movements.

They worked with director Andrew Benson who helped them move about the stage and play their parts well.

The costume and set designers planned with the director and created a look that was historically correct.

The stage manager is ready to make sure everyone on stage and backstage

does the right thing at the right time. All Festival Theatre needs now is

YOU.

YOU have a part to play in *Aesop's Fables*.

You are the audience.

Your part requires you to listen carefully and watch closely. It's okay to laugh or applaud if you enjoy the play, but remember that you and the actors are in the same room. Talking or whispering to friends during the performance might distract the actors.

Help them play their parts well by playing YOUR part well.

Reacting to the Performance

After the performance, share your experience of *Aesop's Fables* with your class, family, and friends:

- What was the most memorable character and why?
- Why do you think these stories have been so popular for so long?
- What are some of the memorable lessons or morals from these fables?
- How does the character of Aesop change over the course of the play?
- What was your favorite part of the play and why?
- Did anything about the play surprise you? Why?

Resources

To learn more...

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/7451/Aesop>

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/326307/Jean-de-La-Fontaine>

www.aesopfables.com

For information about Arts Education opportunities at Festival Theatre, visit www.festivaltheatre.org or call 715.483.3387.