

AESOP'S FABLES (2000 years old)

Fables are short tales with a moral designed to teach us lessons about human behaviour. The characters are often animals that can speak and act just like people.

Aesop was a Greek slave who lived in the 6th century B.C. Legend has it that Aesop was a storyteller who skilfully told stories to trick his master into granting him freedom.

We will use Aesop's fables to engage more deeply into leadership thought and story experimentation.

1. Learn the fable with storyboarding techniques – literally draw it out.
2. Map the story out with verbs to see what is happening in the story.
3. Tell the tale from your perspective, personalizing the narrative to fit a familiar narrative pattern in the organization. Leave out the moral of the story.
4. Allow audience participants to arrive at their own moral of the story.
5. Contrast your take of the moral of the story with Aesop's moral of the story. Does 2000 years of human behaviour make a difference in our study and understanding of leadership? How different?

The Sick Lion and the Fox

A lion fell sick and stayed in his cave. He noticed that of all the animals, the fox never came to visit him. He sent a message to the fox saying how displeased he was and how he would be very glad to have a visit from him. The fox wrote back, hoping for his speedy recovery, but saying that he had noticed many animals going in to see the lion, but not one coming out again.

Morals: 1) Beware the cunning schemes of other people.
2) Take warning from the misfortunes of others.

The Crow and the Pitcher

A crow about to die of thirst suddenly spotted a pitcher on the ground below. When he flew down, he indeed found water in the pitcher. But there was so little, and it was near the bottom, that no matter how hard he twisted and strained, he couldn't reach it. Then the crow tried to tip the pitcher over, hoping that the water would spill out. Alas, he was not strong enough. In desperation, he thought and thought, "How can I get to the water?" All at once, he noticed some pebbles lying around and quickly began to drop them one by one into the pitcher. As each pebble dropped in, the water in the pitcher rose higher and higher until it reached the top and the clever crow could happily quench his thirst.

Moral: Necessity is the mother of invention.

The Contest of Jupiter

One day Jupiter decided to hold a beauty contest for the animal children in his realm, promising great riches to the winner. "Let each of you," he told the parents, "bring your children before me and I will judge who among you has the most beautiful offspring." One by one the animals came up – the elephant, the giraffe, the rabbit, the alligator, and countless others. Every creature tried to convince Jupiter to select their kind. But when it was the monkey's turn, he bowed humbly and said to Jupiter, "The outcome of this contest is of no matter to me. My own child, whom I love dearly, is more beautiful to me than anyone else's. Should another animal win, I will think my child no less beautiful."

Moral: Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

The Brother and Sister

A certain man had a son and a daughter. The boy was very handsome, but the girl was not. One day, the boy regarded himself for a long time in the mirror. Then, stepping away quite satisfied, he told his sister how good looking he was. The little girl, who understood that her brother was insulting her, ran in tears to her father. The father tenderly embraced both children and suggested they look in a mirror every day. "In this way," the father said to his son, "you who think yourself handsome will not darken your looks with an ugly temper. And you," he advised his daughter, "will make up for your lack of beauty by the sweetness of your disposition."

Moral: Handsome is as handsome does.

The Lark and Her Young Ones

A lark had a nest for her newly hatched young ones in a field of corn. Because the corn was nearly ripe, she feared that the farmer would cut it down before her brood was old enough to leave. So when she went out to look for food, she told them to listen to what the farmer said about reaping the corn. Upon her return, the lark learned from her alarmed family that the farmer had asked his neighbours to start reaping the next morning. She assured the children that there was no danger and went out again, leaving the same instructions. When she came back, the young ones were even more alarmed because now the farmer had asked his friends to begin harvesting on the following day. Still calm, the mother lark flew off again. But when she returned the third time, they told her that the farmer had asked his son to sharpen the sickles, for they could not wait any longer for others and would cut the corn themselves. At this news, the lark made haste to depart with her brood. "When a man decides to do things for himself," she said, "they are likely to get done."

Moral: Do not depend on the assistance of others to accomplish what you can do yourself.

The Hawk and the Farmer

A hawk was flying in such eager pursuit of a pigeon that he did not look where he was going and crashed violently into the corner of a hedge. Stunned, the hawk fell to the ground. Then a farmer, who had been watching the chase, ran and picked up the hawk, and was about to finish him off. But the hawk begged the farmer to release him. "I was only hunting a pigeon. I had no intention of harming you!" The farmer answered, "Yes, but what harm had the pigeon done to you?" – and promptly wrung the hawk's neck.

Moral: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

The City Rat and the Country Rat

A plain country rat was visited by an elegant city rat, who had once been his playmate. Delighted to see his old friend again, the country rat served up a hearty meal of new cheese parings and pieces of an old apple. When they had finished eating, the city rat said, "How can you bear to live all alone in this hole, with nothing but trees and mountains and rivers to keep you company? Come with me to the big city, where you can enjoy the conversation of people and the rich life of the court!" So the country rat, intrigued by the offer, accompanied his friend to a great house in the city. They had just made themselves comfortable in a warm room with a deep Persian carpet, when the door opened and the owner entered. Quickly the two rats scurried away, the country rat in a great fright. "If this is your town life," he told the city rat, "I would rather live in peace and safety in the woods." And he went back to his hole in the country.

Moral: Be it ever so humble there's no place like home.

The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

A wolf decided to clothe himself in the skin of a sheep so that he could roam among the flock without being discovered by the shepherd. Every night, while the shepherd slept, the disguised wolf devoured the innocent sheep. The poor shepherd began to keep watch all through the night. Imagine his surprise when he saw one of his sheep attacking another! Rushing in to stop them, he was even more surprised when the sheepskin came away to reveal the vicious wolf. The shepherd quickly grabbed the wolf and hung him from a tree, explaining to the other shepherds who wondered at his action that the dead animal was merely a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Moral: Never judge a book by its cover.

The Wolf and the Lamb

One hot day, a wolf and a lamb arrived at the same time to quench their thirsts in a mountain stream. The wolf stood on higher ground, while the lamb entered the water below. Wanting to pick a quarrel with the lamb, the wolf asked him why he had disturbed the water, making it so muddy that it was undrinkable. The frightened lamb quietly and humbly answered that since the water flowed down from the wolf to him, he could not possibly be muddying the portion the wolf wanted to drink.

"Nevertheless," replied the wolf, determined to provoke an argument, "you are a rascal. I have been told that six months ago you spoke ill of me." When the lamb pointed out that he had not then been born, the wolf, finding it impossible to argue against the truth, went into a rage, seized the helpless lamb and ate him up. "If it was not you, it was your father," the wolf said when he had finished. "It's all the same to me."

Moral: Revenge is the poor delight of small minds.

The Fox and the Stork

The fox invited the stork to dinner and, wanting to play a trick, served his guest soup in a wide shallow dish. This the fox could lap up easily, but the stork, with his pointed beak, could get little of it and went home almost as hungry as he had been when he arrived. A few days later, the stork returned the invitation, offering the fox some minced meat, which he placed in a tall jar with a deep and narrow neck. The stork had no trouble reaching the meat, for his long bill smoothly passed through the neck of the jar. But the fox could only lick the brim. Now he was the one who left with an empty stomach. Still, the fox had to admit, he got what he deserved, his own ill treatment being repaid in kind.

Moral: Do as you would be done by.

The Angler and the Little Fish

An angler caught a little trout and made ready to take it off the hook and put it in his basket. But all at once the fish cried out, urging the angler in a pathetic voice to throw him back into the river. "I am so small," said the fish, "and there is so little of me to eat. If you wait until next year when I am fatter, I shall surely make a better meal." The angler listened to the trout's words and then went ahead and put him in the basket. "You may be right," he told the trout, "but I have you now, and I cannot be certain of catching you again next year."

Moral: A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

The Lion, the Wolf and the Dog

A lion had just captured a doe in the forest and was about to eat it when a wolf arrived, demanding to be given half of the prize. "No," said the lion, "you are a greedy creature and will certainly take more than your share." Then the lion turned on the wolf and angrily insisted that he depart immediately. Meanwhile, a poor honest dog who had heard the argument grew fearful of the lion's rage and quietly started to walk away. But the lion, touched by the dog's humbleness, graciously invited him to share in the feast.

Moral: A modest nature is always recognized and treated with generosity, while an arrogant one is cast off.

The Rabbit and the Vine

A rabbit being chased by hunters through the woods decided to hide himself under the thick leaves of a vine tree. When the deceived hunters rushed past the hiding place, convinced that their prey had gone off in another direction, the rabbit believed himself to be safe. Indeed, he felt so secure that he began to nibble at the leaves of his shelter. But the hunters, hearing the rustling noise, turned around and saw the vine moving. Thinking some wild beast was concealed within, they quickly shot their arrows into the vine and killed the rabbit. The dying rabbit lamented, "I am justly treated for my ingratitude to the vine which kindly protected me in time of danger."

Moral: The winter wind is not nearly so unkind as man's ingratitude.

The Hen and the Swallow

A hen discovered a nest of serpent eggs in the farmyard. Being a kind hearted soul, she sat upon them, wanting to keep them warm until they hatched. A swallow saw the hen and flew down to warn her of the danger. "Are you mad," said the swallow, "to bring forth a brood of such evil creatures? As soon as they are hatched they will set upon you and inflict mortal wounds with their venomous bites." But the hen ignored the swallow's wise advice and persisted in her foolishness. The outcome, alas, was as the swallow predicted.

Moral: Kindness is wasted on the undeserving. Good nature untempered by wisdom is folly.

The Fox and the Tiger

An archer hunting in the woods was so skilful that he slew many of the wild beasts who lived there. The rest took flight, hiding in whatever thickets they could find. At last, the tiger regained courage, came out from his refuge, and told the other animals that he alone would face the hunter and avenge the slaughter of their friends. As the tiger spoke, he became angrier and bolder and began to tear up the ground to show his ferocity. While he was so engaged, the archer sneaked up from behind and pierced his side with an arrow. The tiger roared in pain and tried to draw out the dart with his teeth. Then a fox approached and asked in surprise, "who it was that could wound so mighty a beast." "Alas," moaned the tiger, "I misjudged my enemy, for it was that courageous archer of whom I had no fear."

Moral: Pride comes before the fall.

The Goat, the Kid and the Wolf

A goat, upon leaving her shed to search for dinner, told her young kid to bolt the door behind her and let no one in until she returned. A wolf lurking nearby heard the goat's instructions and saw the chance to get his own dinner by deceiving the innocent kid. He stepped up to the door, knocked loudly, and imitating the goat's voice, asked to be let in. But the kid was mindful of his mother's warning. Standing up on his hind legs, he peeked over the top of the shed, discovered the wolf, and told him to go about his business; for though he might sound like a goat, he looked too much like a wolf to be trusted.

Moral: Villains prey upon innocence. The wise child heeds the advice of his more experienced parents.

The Thieves and the Cock

Two thieves broke into a house and set about robbing the owners of their valuables. But to their great disappointment, the thieves found nothing worth taking away except for a cock, which they grabbed and carried off. Just as they were about to kill it, the cock begged for mercy, reminding the thieves how usefully he served mankind by crowing every morning to announce the dawn. "That," replied the thieves, "is the very reason why we will wring your neck, for your crowing rouses people from their slumber so that we cannot rob them!"

Moral: What the good esteem, the wicked scorn.

The Two Dogs

A dog about to have a litter begged another dog to lend her his house, so that her newborn pups would have shelter. The kind dog agreed and immediately moved out of his house. But after the pups were born, the mother made no effort to depart, despite the polite request of the owner. A month later, they were still there, the mother explaining that her pups were as yet too weak to leave. Again the compassionate dog permitted them to stay. But when a full year had passed, the dog finally insisted that they vacate at once. "We will see about that," said the other dog, "for now that my pups have grown strong, you are heavily outnumbered and cannot hope to force us out!"

Moral: To the devious of heart, possession is nine-tenths of the law.

The Young Men and the Butcher

Two young men entered a butcher shop on the pretext of buying some meat. While the butcher's back was turned, one of the youths grabbed a piece of beef and handed it to his companion, who hid it under his cloak. Turning around, the butcher discovered the beef missing and, since the youths were the only customers in the shop, he accused them of stealing it. The first young man swore he did not have the meat. The second also proclaimed his innocence, even as he held the meat under his cloak. "Well, gentlemen," said the butcher, "I see you cannot make up your minds. But although I do not know which of you has taken my meat, I am sure that between you there is a thief."

Moral: Trust not the word of a thief. He who will steal will also not hesitate to lie.

The Man and His Statue

A poor man had a statue of a god, to which he prayed every day, imploring the idol to make him a wealthy man. He spent so much time praying for money that he had no time left to work for it. But his prayers were to no avail and he grew poorer and poorer until one day, in anger and frustration, he took a mallet and broke the statue in two. Imagine his astonishment when he found the inside of the idol filled with gold coins! "You hypocrite!" he told the broken statue. "When I showed you respect you gave me nothing. The minute I insult you my prayers are answered!"

Moral: False riches make false friends.

The Wolf and he Crane

A wolf, after devouring his prey, found a bone stuck in his throat. He was in so much pain that he went howling through the countryside, begging every creature he met to come to his assistance and even promising to reward anyone who could extract the thorny thing. Finally, a crane arrived and, sticking his long neck down the cruel wolf's throat, managed to pluck out the bone. When the crane asked for the promised reward, the wolf looked at him contemptuously and said: "I did not think you would be so ungrateful! Here I had your head in my mouth and could have bitten it off whenever I pleased. But even though I decided to leave you unharmed, you are still not content!"

Moral: He who serves a villain cannot expect fair treatment.

The Lion Who Grew Old

A lion, who in the prime of life had been ferocious and cruel, became weak and sick in old age. All the beasts of the forest who had suffered at the lion's rage now sought revenge. The boar ripped the lion with his tusks, the bull gored him with his horns, and the wolf gnashed at him with his sharp fangs. When the ass saw that the avenging beasts were not in danger, he too wanted to have a turn and went up and threw his heels in the lion's face. "Oh, great cruelty," groaned the lion as he watched the ass walk away. "It is bad enough to suffer insults from the brave and valiant, but to be scorned by so lowly a creature as an ass is worse than dying a thousand deaths!"

The Cock and the Jewel

A gallant young cock, in the company of two lovely hens, went poking about a dunghill looking for something with which to amuse his lady friends. After much searching, he came upon a jewel. Although he knew what it was – for it sparkled and glistened as only a jewel could – the cock did not know what to do with it. Disappointed, he shook his head and looked at the jewel with contempt. “I can’t imagine what you are doing here,” he said to it, “but you are surely of no use to me. My tastes lie in quite another direction, for I would rather have one grain of sweet, delectable barley than all the jewels under the sun.”

Moral: utility is the most accurate test of worth.

The Lion and the Other Beasts

A lion entered into an alliance with the other wild beasts, agreeing that they should hunt together and share the spoils equally. One day, he met with three other beasts and they began to chase a deer. The deer, clearly outnumbered, was soon caught, killed and divided into four parts. But before the other three hunters could take their portions, the lion summoned all the animals to the spot and, with an air of majesty, pointed to one of the parts and said: "This one is mine by right of my noble descent from the royal family of Lion. That one," he continued, pointing the second part, "I claim because without my strength and courage we would not have won the chase. The third piece I shall accept as tribute from you, my loyal subjects. As for the last, you know that our stores are low, so I must insist that you leave it in my care for safekeeping against leaner days."

Moral: No alliance is safe that is made with the wicked, if they are superior in power.

The Blind Man and the Lame

A blind man and a lame man encountered each other at the beginning of a very rocky and bumpy stretch of road. The blind man, fearing that he would trip and fall over some unseen obstruction, asked the lame man to guide him. "How can I do that," replied the lame man, "when I am barely able to walk? But you seem very strong and if you will carry me on your shoulders, I will warn you against anything that blocks the path. You will be my feet and I will be your eyes. In this way we may seek our fortunes together." The blind man happily agreed and the two travelled on in safety and pleasure.

Moral: There is no such thing as complete independence. What one man lacks, another supplies.

The Eagle, the Cat and the Sow

An eagle built her nest in the top branches of an oak tree. A wild cat lived in a hole in the middle of the tree, and in the hollow part at the bottom was a sow with her litter of piglets. But this happy neighbourhood did not remain so for long because of the wild cat's wicked designs. One day, she crept up to the eagle and warned that they were in danger. "That filthy sow," said the cat, "intends to eat up the roots of our tree so that she may more easily get at our young ones. I am going to stay at home and carefully observe her motions." When she had in this way thoroughly frightened the eagle, the cat went down and spoke to the sow. "I hope you do not plan to go out today, for I overheard the eagle tell her brood that as soon as you leave she will get them a piglet for dinner. And since I have no doubt that she would gladly have a kitten as well, I must rush home and protect my little ones." So the wild cat went home, but managed to sneak out at night for her prey. In the meantime, the eagle and the sow saw her watching in great concern the whole day long and were so convinced by the deception that they dared not venture out for fear of the other. Before long, they starved to death and their young ones fell victim to the cat.

Moral: Heed not the advice of a gossiping neighbour.

The Frog and the Fox

A frog leapt out of the lake onto a high rock. From this vantage, he proclaimed to all the beasts of the forest that he was an excellent physician. He could cure every manner of illness and would turn away no one who sought his help. All this the frog said in a speech filled with difficult words, which nobody understood and which made the other beasts admire him and believe everything he said. But soon an indignant fox stood up and asked the frog how he, with his thin jaws, his sickly complexion, and his blotched body, could dare pretend to heal the diseases of others?

Moral: We cannot correct faults in others until we have corrected them in ourselves.

The Dogs and the Wolf

A lean, gaunt wolf, who was barely able to survive in the wild woods, envied a group of plump and hearty dogs. "If you do as we do," said the dogs, "you too can fare as well." Eagerly the wolf asked what would be expected of him. "Very little," replied the dogs. "You have only to guard the master's house, caress him, and be attentive to his family and you will be well fed and warmly housed." To these conditions the wolf had no objections. But suddenly he noticed that the hair around the dogs' necks was worn off and asked why. The dogs answered that these were marks left by the collars to which their chains were attached. "Chains?" the wolf exclaimed, "you mean you cannot roam about in freedom?" The wolf quickly took leave of the dogs, having decided that half a meal with liberty was better than a full meal in chains.

Moral: All the riches in the world are not worth the loss of liberty.

The Ant and the Grasshopper

A nation of ants spent a busy summer collecting provisions to see them through the long winter. They were about to shut themselves up for that dreary season when a grasshopper approached in great distress. In dread of perishing with cold and hunger, he humbly begged them to take him in for the winter. One of the ants asked the grasshopper what he had done during the summer. Had he not laid in supplies, as they had done? "My friends," said the grasshopper, "I passed the summer merrily drinking and dancing and, alas, never gave a thought to winter." The ant, sadly shaking his head at such folly, replied: "They who play in the summer risk starving in the winter."

Moral: Use the present to plan for the future.

The Lion in Love

A lion fell madly in love with a beautiful young girl who happened to be the forester's daughter. So enamoured was the lion that he felt he could not live without the fair lady and boldly asked the forester for her hand in marriage. The forester was at first astonished at the strange proposal, but soon realized that by agreeing he might get the lion in his power. A refusal, he further thought, might enrage the lion and endanger them all. So the forester consented to the marriage – if the lion would accept certain conditions. Because the girl was young and tender, he must have his teeth pulled out and his claws cut off lest he hurt or frighten her. The lion was too much in love to refuse. But no sooner had he been deprived of teeth and claws than the forester beat him senseless.

Moral: Love turns to folly when it clouds clear judgment.

The Cat and the Mice

A certain house was so infested with mice that the owners bought a cat who proceeded to eat the mice up in great numbers every night. The alarmed mice consulted with each other as to how to best protect themselves from so terrible an enemy. Finally, they decided that henceforth none of them would descend below the top shelf, which the cat could not reach. The cat then tried to lure them down by a clever trick. She hung herself by her hind legs from a hook in the pantry, hoping to convince the mice she was dead and that they could again run freely through the kitchen. But one old mouse was even more clever. Peeping her head over the edge of the shelf, she squeaked, "You may look harmless, Mrs. Cat, but I would not trust myself to go near you even if you were stuffed with straw!"

Moral: Always be on guard against those who have once done you harm.

The Fox and the Grapes

A hungry fox came upon a vineyard filled with huge, luscious grapes and his mouth watered at the thought of so delicious a dinner. But alas, the vines were nailed high up on top of a trellis and try as he might, the fox could not get to them. No matter how he leapt and sprang, the grapes remained beyond his reach. At last, tired and disappointed, the fox cried out, "Let someone else have these grapes, for they are green and sour and I wouldn't eat them anyway!"

Moral: Those who pass judgment on what they cannot have make poor critics.

The Tortoise and the Eagle

A tortoise grew weary of always having to slowly creep along the ground and yearned to be able to fly through the skies. He gave notice that if any bird were willing to take him up in the air, he would provide a generous reward. There was, it seemed, a rich treasure buried in the earth, whose location he would reveal after the flight. An eagle accepted the offer, carried the tortoise aloft, gently returned him to the ground, and then demanded his reward. But the tortoise was forced to admit that he could not keep his promise, for he had invented the whole story only to get his wish fulfilled. So the eagle, angry at having been deceived, again lifted the tortoise, flew to a great height, and let him fall to the ground, where he was dashed to pieces.

Moral: Make no promises you cannot keep. Falsity is soon detected and punished.

The Snake and the File

A snake crawled into an ironmonger's shop and began to lick at a metal file. She saw that the file had blood on it and the more blood she saw the more she licked at the file because she thought it was the file that was bleeding and not her self. Finally she could lick no longer and began to bite the file but, finding this useless, she eventually left it alone.

Moral: It is useless to go on worrying at something when the only thing we are hurting is our self.

The Ass and the Lion Go Hunting

A vicious lion had so terrified the beasts in the forest that they went into hiding. When the hungry lion could find no more beasts to prey upon, he invited an ass to join him in his pursuit. Said the lion to the ass, "Go and hide yourself in that thicket and start to bray in the most hideous manner possible." The ass did as he was instructed, and the frightened beasts, not knowing what to make of such a fearful noise, ran out of their hiding places. No sooner had they emerged than the lion seized and killed as many as he could. "Congratulations!" the lion called out to the ass. "You performed so well that had I not known your meek nature, I would have been frightened of you myself."

Moral: The cowardly always let others act for them.

The Raven and the Snake

A hungry raven saw a snake basking in the sun and thought, "Now I shall have some lunch." Swooping down, the raven seized the snake in his beak and tried to fly away to a quiet place where he could eat in peace. But the snake, twisting and turning with pain, wrapped himself so tightly around the raven that the bird could not move. Then he bit the raven with his poisonous fangs. Mortally wounded, the dying raven ruefully confessed that he deserved his punishment for having tried to satisfy himself at the cost of the snake's welfare.

Moral: You cannot succeed at another's expense.

The Young Man and His Cat

A certain young man had a beautiful cat with whom he fell so much in love that he could not sleep for the yearning of her. He begged Venus, the goddess of love, to take pity on him and relieve his suffering. The kind goddess heard his prayers and instantly transformed the cat into a beautiful young woman whom the joyful youth promptly married. But on the first night, the bride heard a mouse scampering about, jumped out of bed, and began to chase it around the bedroom. The young man was ashamed, and Venus was offended at such base behaviour. Realizing that her convert, although a woman in form, was a cat at heart, the goddess restored her to her original shape, hoping in this way to make manners and person more suitable to each other.

Moral: Old wine in new bottles still tastes the same.

The Bear and the Beehives

A bear climbed over a fence to the place where the bees were kept and began to plunder the hives, robbing the bees of their honey. In revenge, the bees swarmed around the bear and attacked him. Although they could not pierce his thick skin, their little stings so irritated his eyes and nostrils that he could not endure the smarting pain. In his impatient efforts to chase the bees away, the bear grabbed at his head with such force that he tore off the skin over his ears. Thus, he suffered ample punishment for the injury he had inflicted on the bees by breaking open their cells.

Moral: Crime does not go unpunished and punishment often comes at the hand of victim.

The Horse and the Wolf

A wolf travelling through the country happened upon a field of oats. Not being able to eat such food, he was about to move on when he saw a horse approaching. "Look, my friend," he said when the horse had come up to him, "I have found a whole field of oats which I shall not touch, but rather leave to you. Indeed, I shall enjoy watching you partake of so tasty a lunch." But the horse was not deceived by the wolf's apparent good nature. "Your generosity is a sham," he told the wolf as he angrily kicked him, "for if you could eat oats you would have gorged yourself and left me not so much a grain!"

Moral: There is no goodness in offering to others what is of no value to you.

The Fox Without a Tail

A fox, caught in a hunter's trap, after much difficulty finally escaped with the loss of his tail. Although he was grateful to have escaped with only this small injury, he nevertheless felt embarrassed at being tailless. Not wanting to appear ridiculous to his fellow foxes, he called them together and began to proclaim the virtues of his condition. He even suggested that cutting off the tail was a fashion that would become them all. "Indeed," he argued, "tails are quite useless and flop inconveniently about. Now that I am without mine, I can assure you that I have never been happier." Then as the tailless fox looked around to see whether the others had been convinced, an old fox got up and said with a sly grin, "You surely found it convenient to part with your tail, and perhaps one day, when we are in similar circumstances, we shall do the same."

Moral: Heed not the cry of fashion, for it is a conceited call, often made out of self-interest.

The Man and His Two Wives

There once was a man with greying hair who had two wives, one older than he, the other younger. The old woman did not want to look his senior, and began to pull out all his black hairs so that he should have an entirely grey head. But the young woman, ashamed to have a lover so much older than she, plucked out all the grey hairs, the better to disguise his years. Between the two ladies, the man was soon completely bald – an appearance that neither of his two wives liked, whereupon they both left him.

Moral: He who tries to please everyone, pleases no one.

The Dog and the Cat

A family had two pets, a dog and a cat, who had grown up together in the household. Never were two creatures happier in each other's company! They frolicked and romped all the day long, much to the delight and amusement of the family, who found their playfulness a great source of entertainment. Still, the family could not help but notice that at mealtimes, when scraps fell from the table or a bone was thrown to them, the two friends fought over the leftovers, snarling and snapping like the bitterest of foes.

Moral: Jealousy and greed break the bonds of friendship.

The Hen and the Fox

A fox came upon a hen sitting high up in a tree. His mouth watered at the sight of her, but the lucky hen was beyond his grasp. "Hello, dear hen," he said to her with feigned warmth. "I heard that you were ill and came rushing to see you. Pray tell, how do you fare? Why don't you come down and let me feel your pulse? You do not look at all well." The fox continued his prattle in this affected manner until the hen answered him. "You are quite right. I have never been so sick in all my life. I beg your pardon for being such poor company, but I fear that if I come down from my roost, the effort will do me in."

Moral: Do not be flattered by the anxious concern of a foe. The welfare he seeks to improve is his own.

The Proud Frog and the Ox

An ox grazing in the meadow accidentally walked over a group of young frogs and trod one of them to death. The others ran home to tell their mother, who asked, "What manner of animal was this?" Answered her children in awe and alarm, "Why, it was the hugest creature we have ever seen!" The mother frog could not believe another creature to be larger than she and, swelling and blowing up her belly, said to her little ones, "Was it this big?" "Oh, much bigger," they answered. "This big?" she replied, enlarging herself even more. "Dear mother," the frogs cried out, "if you were to grow until you burst, you would never be so big!" The old frog, not to be outdone, tried again. And, indeed, she burst.

Moral: Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.

The Eagle and the Crow

An eagle came down from the top of a lofty rock, alighted upon a lamb, seized it with her talons, and flew away with the prize. A crow, having seen the eagle's exploit, wanted to do the same thing. She therefore perched upon a ram, but instead of being able to carry the creature off, she found her claws entangled in its fleece so that she couldn't move. Soon a shepherd came by, took the crow, and gave her to some boys, who eagerly asked what kind of bird it was. "An hour ago," said the shepherd, "she fancied herself an eagle. But I suspect by this time she is certain of being a crow."

Moral: Do not measure your own abilities against those of others, whom nature may have endowed with greater talents.