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Aesop's Fables: Text Analysis

Long before books were printed or the internet existed, stories were passed down entirely by word of mouth. Around 600 BCE in ancient Greece, a storyteller named Aesop shared tales that would become famous all over the world. Historians believe Aesop may have been an enslaved man who used his cleverness, wit, and storytelling to share his ideas. Aesop taught lessons using **fables**—short stories where animals act, talk, and think like humans.

Theme and Central Idea

Directions: Read the three fables below. Then, synthesize the information to identify the central idea they all share.


The Swollen Fox A VERY HUNGRY FOX, seeing some bread and meat left by shepherds in the hollow of an oak, crept into the hole and made a hearty meal. When he finished, he was so full that he was not able to get out, and began to groan and lament his fate. Another Fox passing by heard his cries, and coming up, inquired the cause of his complaining. On learning what had happened, he said to him, "Ah, you will have to remain there, my friend, until you become such as you were when you crept in, and then you will easily get out."

The Flies and the Honey-Pot A NUMBER of Flies were attracted to a jar of honey which had been overturned in a housekeeper's room, and placing their feet in it, ate greedily. Their feet, however, became so smeared with the honey that they could not use their wings, nor release themselves, and were suffocated. Just as they were expiring, they exclaimed, "O foolish creatures that we are, for the sake of a little pleasure we have destroyed ourselves."

The Hen and the Golden Eggs A COTTAGER and his wife had a Hen that laid a golden egg every day. They supposed that the Hen must contain a great lump of gold in its inside, and in order to get the gold they killed it. Having done so, they found to their surprise that the Hen differed in no respect from their other hens. The foolish pair, thus hoping to become rich all at once, deprived themselves of the gain of which they were assured day by day.

1. What central idea or theme connects the downfalls of the Fox, the Flies, and the Cottager?

- A) They were too slow and easily trapped.
- B) They foolishly trusted the wrong person.
- C) They were destroyed by their own greed.

 **STOP:** Did you get question 1 correct? Check in with your teacher before moving on to this part.

Inferring the Missing Moral

Directions: The final lessons (morals) have been removed from the two fables below. Read the texts carefully and infer the missing moral.

The Wolf In Sheep's Clothing ONCE UPON A TIME a Wolf resolved to disguise his appearance in order to secure food more easily. Encased in the skin of a sheep, he pastured with the flock deceiving the shepherd by his costume. In the evening he was shut up by the shepherd in the fold; the gate was closed, and the entrance made thoroughly secure. But the shepherd, returning to the fold during the night to obtain meat for the next day, mistakenly caught up the Wolf instead of a sheep, and killed him instantly.


2. Based on the wolf's fate, which moral belongs at the end of this text?

- A) Never trust a shepherd to do a dog's job.
- B) If you seek to do harm, harm will find you.
- C) Slow and steady wins the race.

The Miser A MISER sold all that he had and bought a lump of gold, which he buried in a hole in the ground by the side of an old wall and went to look at daily. One of his workmen observed his frequent visits to the spot and decided to watch his movements. He soon discovered the secret of the hidden treasure, and digging down, came to the lump of gold, and stole it. The Miser, on his next visit, found the hole empty and began to tear his hair and to make loud lamentations. A neighbor, seeing him overcome with grief and learning the cause, said, "Pray do not grieve so; but go and take a stone, and place it in the hole, and fancy that the gold is still lying there..."

3. What is the neighbor trying to teach the Miser? Select the missing moral.

- A) A penny saved is a penny earned.
- B) Never trust the people you work with.
- C) Wealth is completely worthless if it is never used.

 **STOP:** Did you get questions 2 and 3 correct? Check in with your teacher before moving on to the next page.

Personification and Character Traits

Directions: Aesop used animals as reflections of our own human nature. Read the final two fables and identify the human traits these characters represent.

The Ants and the Grasshopper THE ANTS were spending a fine winter's day drying grain collected in the summertime. A Grasshopper, perishing with famine, passed by and earnestly begged for a little food. The Ants inquired of him, "Why did you not treasure up food during the summer?" He replied, "I had not leisure enough. I passed the days in singing." They then said in derision: "If you were foolish enough to sing all the summer, you must dance supperless to bed in the winter."

4. Aesop uses the Grasshopper to represent a very specific type of person. Based on his actions, which human trait does the Grasshopper reflect?

- A) A serious person who always plans for the future.
- B) A foolish person who lives only for the moment.
- C) A greedy person who takes things that don't belong to them.

The Fox and the Woodcutter A FOX, running before the hounds, came across a Woodcutter felling an oak and begged him to show him a safe hiding-place. The Woodcutter advised him to take shelter in his own hut, so the Fox crept in and hid himself in a corner. The huntsman soon came up with his hounds and inquired of the Woodcutter if he had seen the Fox. He declared that he had not seen him, and yet pointed, all the time he was speaking, to the hut where the Fox lay hidden. The huntsman took no notice of the signs, but believing his word, hastened forward in the chase. As soon as they were well away, the Fox departed without taking any notice of the Woodcutter: whereon he called to him and reproached him, saying, "You ungrateful fellow, you owe your life to me, and yet you leave me without a word of thanks." The Fox replied, "Indeed, I should have thanked you fervently if your deeds had been as good as your words, and if your hands had not been traitors to your speech."

5. The Fox says, 'I should have thanked you fervently if your deeds had been as good as your words.' What kind of human behavior does the Woodcutter represent?

- A) A sincere friend who always protects others.
- B) A clever person who always escapes danger.
- C) A hypocrite whose actions do not match his words.

 **STOP: Did you get questions 4 and 5 correct? Check in with your teacher before moving on to the Google Form.**

