

AESOP'S ABC

Ancient Fables Retold by Heather Forest

Aesop's ABC

Ancient Fables Retold by Heather Forest

© Heather Forest 2008

This collection of Aesop's Fables, retold by Heather Forest, is organized by the alphabet. Aesop was a famous storyteller who lived 2500 years ago in ancient Greece. Originally brought to Greece as a slave, he rose to great renown and respect because of his skill at creating fables. By word of mouth, his tales traveled from land to land and were passed down from one generation to another. The timeless wisdom of Aesop's tales has been shared in countless retellings by storytellers and writers throughout the ages.

A	Antlers	3
B	The Boy Who Cried Wolf	4
C	The City Mouse and the Country Mouse	5
D	The Dog and His Bone	6
E	Everyone Agrees to Peace	6
F	The Fox and the Crow	7
G	The Girl and Her Bucket	7
H	The Honest Woodcutter	8
I	Insulting the King	9
J	Jugs in the Water	9
K	Keeping the Gold	10
L	The Lion and the Mouse	11
M	Mice in Council	12
N	The North Wind and the Sun	12
O	Ox and the Frog	13
P	The Pitcher and the Crow	13
Q	Quarrelsome Children	14
R	Running For His Life	14
S	Sour Grapes	15
T	The Tortoise and the Hare	15
U	Under the Lion's Skin	16
V	Visiting the Lion's Cave	16
W	The Wolf and the Goat	17
X	X Marks the Spot	17
Y	You Are Beautiful As You Are	18
Z	Zig-Zag Walk	19

Aesop's ABC

Ancient Fables Retold by Heather Forest

© Heather Forest 2008

Antlers



A handsome stag with majestic antlers admired himself in a lake. As he looked at his reflection he thought, "My antlers are beautiful! But these spindly legs of mine are so skinny I wish I could hide them in shame."

Just then a hunter's arrow whizzed by and the stag bounded into the woods. As he ran, his beautiful antlers caught and snagged on the branches of a low-growing tree. Struggling, he finally pulled himself free. If it weren't for the exquisite speed of his legs, he would surely have been captured.

After that, when he gazed at his spindly legs, his pride would swell. "In times of danger," he thought, "they serve me well."

Aesop's ABC

Ancient Fables Retold by Heather Forest

© Heather Forest 2008

The Boy Who Cried Wolf



There once was a shepherd boy who was bored as he sat on the hillside watching the village sheep. To amuse himself he took a great breath and sang out, "Wolf! Wolf! The Wolf is chasing the sheep!"

The villagers came running up the hill to help the boy drive the wolf away. But when they arrived at the top of the hill, they found no wolf. The boy laughed at the sight of their angry faces.

"Don't cry 'wolf, shepherd boy," said the villagers, "when there's no wolf!" They went grumbling back down the hill.

Later, the boy sang out again, "Wolf! Wolf! The wolf is chasing the sheep!" To his naughty delight, he watched the villagers run up the hill to help him drive the wolf away.

When the villagers saw no wolf they sternly said, "Save your frightened song for when there is really something wrong! Don't cry 'wolf' when there is NO wolf!"

But the boy just grinned and watched them go grumbling down the hill once more.

Later, he saw a REAL wolf prowling about his flock. Alarmed, he leaped to his feet and sang out as loudly as he could, "Wolf! Wolf!"

But the villagers thought he was trying to fool them again, and so they didn't come.

At sunset, everyone wondered why the shepherd boy hadn't returned to the village with their sheep. They went up the hill to find the boy. They found him weeping.

"There really was a wolf here! The flock has scattered! I cried out, "Wolf!" Why didn't you come?"

An old man tried to comfort the boy as they walked back to the village.

"We'll help you look for the lost sheep in the morning," he said, putting his arm around the youth, "Nobody believes a liar...even when he is telling the truth!"

Aesop's ABC

Ancient Fables Retold by Heather Forest

© Heather Forest 2008

The City Mouse and the Country Mouse



There once was a mouse who liked his country house until his cousin came for a visit.

"In the city where I live," his cousin said, "we dine on cheese and fish and bread. Each night my dinner is brought to me. I eat whatever I choose. While you, country cousin, work your paws to the bone for humble crumbs in this humble home. I'm used to finery. To each his own, I see!"

Upon hearing this, the country mouse looked again at his plain brown house. Suddenly he wasn't satisfied anymore. "Why should I hunt and scrape for food to store?" he said. "Cousin, I'm coming to the city with you!"

Off they went into the fine town house of the plump and prosperous city mouse.

"Shhh! The people are in the parlor," the city mouse said. "Let's sneak into the kitchen for some cheese and bread."

The city mouse gave his wide-eyed country cousin a grand tour of the leftover food on the table. "It's the easy life," the city mouse said, and he smiled as he bit into a piece of bread.

Just as they were both about to bite into a chunk of cheddar cheese, In came the CAT!

"Run! Run!" said the city mouse. "The cat's in the house!"

Just as the country mouse scampered for his life out of the window, he said, "Cousin, I'm going back to the country! You never told me that a CAT lives here! Thank you, but I'll take my humble crumbs in comfort over all of your finery with fear!"

Aesop's ABC

Ancient Fables Retold by Heather Forest

© Heather Forest 2008

The Dog and His Bone



A hound dog found a bone and held it tightly in his mouth. He growled and scowled at anyone who attempted to take it away. Off into the woods he went to bury his prize.

When he came to a stream, he trotted over the footbridge and happened to glance into the water. He saw his own reflection. Thinking it was another dog with a bigger bone, he growled and scowled at it. The reflection growled and scowled back.

"I'll get THAT bone too," thought the greedy dog, and he snapped his sharp teeth at the image in the water.

Alas, his own big bone fell with a splash, out of sight, the moment he opened his mouth to bite!

Everyone Agrees To Peace



A sly fox tried to trick a rooster into coming down from his perch.

"Brother Bird," the fox said, "come down and have a friendly chat!"

"No," said the rooster, "I'm sure you'd eat me."

"Oh, I wouldn't," said the crafty fox, "Haven't you heard? Everyone has agreed to live in peace."

"Is that so?" said rooster, who was just as crafty.

Stretching his neck, the rooster pretended to look at something far off in the distance.

"What are you looking at?" asked the fox curiously.

"Oh...Just a pack of hungry fox hounds headed right this way."

Upon hearing this, the fox trembled in his tracks and ran off.

"Come back!" crowed the rooster, "Why are you running away? I thought you said that everyone has agreed to live in peace."

"Well, perhaps those hungry hounds haven't heard about it yet," said the fox, and he bounded away.

Story Arts ♦ PO Box 354 ♦ Huntington, NY, 11743 ♦ (631-271-2511)

<http://www.storyarts.org>

Aesop's ABC

Ancient Fables Retold by Heather Forest

© Heather Forest 2008

The Fox and the Crow



There once was a big black crow sitting high up in the trees. In his beak he had a nice, round cheese.

Along came a fox, as clever as they come, "Mmmm," he thought. "I'd like to have a bite of that cheese. It will be easy to get some...."

"Oh crow," called fox, "if your voice is half as beautiful as those fine feathers I see, it would please my ears to hear you sing a little melody!"

Well, crow had never heard anyone say such a complimentary thing. So, he opened up his beak and he began to squawk and sing.

Down fell the cheese into the waiting mouth of the fox below.

"Oh no!" squawked the crow, "you've stolen my dinner!"

"Not at all!" said the fox, licking his lips. "It was a fair enough trade! Vain crow, with your head up in the trees! You got the compliments, and I got the cheese!"

The Girl and Her Bucket



A young girl was going to market with a bucket of milk on her head.

"With the gold that I get from the sale of this milk, I'll buy a red hen," she said. "The hen will lay eggs, they'll hatch and then I'll have many chicks to raise. I'll feed them well and when they're grown, they will each lay eggs. and those eggs will hatch and I will have more hens, who'll lay more eggs that will hatch into chicks..."

Before long I'll be rich and I'll wear fine clothes with emeralds and rubies from my collar to my toes. and one day perhaps I shall visit the Queen. I shall bring her rare gifts from China. I'll enter the court with my arms full of treasure. Bowing low I shall say, "FOR YOUR MAJESTY'S PLEASURE!"

And she bowed low...

With that sweep of her arm, she knocked off the bucket and spilled her fantasy load.

"Oh dear," she cried, "my dreams are splattered in puddles of milk on the road..."

Story Arts ♦ PO Box 354 ♦ Huntington, NY, 11743 ♦ (631-271-2511)

<http://www.storyarts.org>

Aesop's ABC

Ancient Fables Retold by Heather Forest
© Heather Forest 2008

The Honest Woodcutter



"Woe is me!" a poor woodcutter cried when he dropped his ax into a deep pond. A friendly water spirit appeared before him with a silver ax and asked, "Is this yours?"

"No," the woodcutter said.

The spirit returned with a golden ax.

"Is this yours?" she asked.

"No," said the woodcutter.

Then the spirit appeared with his plain wooden ax.

"That one is mine!" said the woodcutter happily.

"You've been so honest," said the spirit, "take the gold and silver ax too!"

On the way home the woodcutter met a rich merchant. When the merchant heard the woodcutter's tale, he ran to the pond and dropped HIS wooden ax in.

"Woe is me!" he cried.

The spirit appeared with a silver ax.

"That one is mine!" the merchant said quickly.

"You know it is not," said the spirit, and disappeared.

The rich man's wooden ax stayed on the bottom of the deep pond.

Aesop's ABC

Ancient Fables Retold by Heather Forest
© Heather Forest 2008

Insulting the King



A ferocious lion awoke one morning with bad breath and asked his friend the jackal, "Is my breath sweet or sour?"

"It's quite sour, sire," said the jackal.

"How dare you insult me!" roared the lion, and ate him up.

Lion asked the antelope, "Is my breath sweet or sour?"

Seeing what had just happened to jackal, antelope replied, "Your breath is sweet!"

"Liar!" roared the lion, and ate him up.

Then lion asked the rabbit, "And what do YOU think of my breath?"

The rabbit saw what had happened to both jackal and antelope and decided he must be very tactful not to insult the King.

"Sire," said rabbit, "as to the sweetness of your breath, if I may be so bold, I cannot tell..."

AHH CHOOO!

I have a cold."

Jugs In the Water



Two jugs, one of clay and one of shiny brass, floated in the raging river, which was swollen from the rain.

As the jugs swirled between the rocks jutting up out of the water, the brass jug said, "Stay close to me, friend. I'll help you make your way! I'm hard and made of brass. I'm much stronger than clay."

"Dear friend," said the clay jug, "Until we are in calm waters and we find a peaceful place, be thoughtful. Keep your distance! What I really need is space! You can protect YOURSELF from breaking on the rocks. That is true. But, how can you protect ME from bumping into YOU?"

Aesop's ABC

Ancient Fables Retold by Heather Forest

© Heather Forest 2008

Keeping the Gold



There was once a man who loved gold so much, he melted down all the gold he owned into a huge golden boulder. Thinking it would be easier to keep in this form, he buried it in the ground behind his house. Each night he dug it up, looked at it, and then buried it again.

One night, a thief, who had seen him at his nightly task, stole the golden boulder and put an ordinary stone in its place.

When the man came out to dig up his gold, he discovered the switch and began to moan and shout about his loss. The thief, watching in the shadows, heard the pitiful moans and said, "Why are you so upset? The golden boulder you buried might as well have been stone. For, you never ever used it while you kept it for your own!"

Aesop's ABC

Ancient Fables Retold by Heather Forest
© Heather Forest 2008

The Lion and the Mouse



A small mouse crept up to a sleeping lion. The mouse admired the lion's ears, his long whiskers and his great mane.

"Since he's sleeping," thought the mouse, "he'll never suspect I'm here!"

With that, the little mouse climbed up onto the lion's tail, ran across its back, slid down its leg and jumped off of its paw. The lion awoke and quickly caught the mouse between its claws.

"Please," said the mouse, "let me go and I'll come back and help you someday."

The lion laughed, "You are so small! How could ever help me?"

The lion laughed so hard he had to hold his belly! The mouse jumped to freedom and ran until she was far, far away.

The next day, two hunters came to the jungle. They went to the lion's lair. They set a huge rope snare. When the lion came home that night, he stepped into the trap.

He roared! He wept! But he couldn't pull himself free.

The mouse heard the lion's pitiful roar and came back to help him.

The mouse eyed the trap and noticed the one thick rope that held it together. She began nibbling and nibbling until the rope broke. The lion was able to shake off the other ropes that held him tight. He stood up free again!

The lion turned to the mouse and said, "Dear friend, I was foolish to ridicule you for being small. You helped me by saving my life after all!"

Aesop's ABC

Ancient Fables Retold by Heather Forest

© Heather Forest 2008

Mice In Council



A terrifying cat had come to live in the big house. Every time the mice went into the kitchen for a nibble, the cat would send them scampering.

"We'll starve!" they shouted, and decided to have a council meeting. One by one the mice spoke, but no one could think of a plan.

Finally, a boastful mouse stepped forward and proclaimed his idea to be best. He explained, in detail, how a small bell attached to the cat's collar would warn them all of his approach. Patting himself on his own back for the excellent idea, he sat down.

The oldest mouse stood up and said, "You are a very clever fellow to think of a plan like that! But, now tell us, are you BRAVE enough to put the bell on the cat?"

The North Wind and the Sun



The North Wind boasted of great strength. The Sun argued that there was great power in gentleness.

"We shall have a contest," said the Sun.

Far below, a man traveled a winding road. He was wearing a warm winter coat.

"As a test of strength," said the Sun, "Let us see which of us can take the coat off of that man."

"It will be quite simple for me to force him to remove his coat," bragged the Wind.

The Wind blew so hard, the birds clung to the trees. The world was filled with dust and leaves. But the harder the wind blew down the road, the tighter the shivering man clung to his coat.

Then, the Sun came out from behind a cloud. Sun warmed the air and the frosty ground. The man on the road unbuttoned his coat.

The sun grew slowly brighter and brighter.

Soon the man felt so hot, he took off his coat and sat down in a shady spot.

"How did you do that?" said the Wind.

"It was easy," said the Sun, "I lit the day. Through gentleness I got my way."

Story Arts ♦ PO Box 354 ♦ Huntington, NY, 11743 ♦ (631-271-2511)

<http://www.storyarts.org>

Aesop's ABC

Ancient Fables Retold by Heather Forest

© Heather Forest 2008

The Ox and the Frog



A young frog set out on his first adventure. As he came out of the pond he saw a large ox grazing in a field. Having never before seen such a creature, he hopped excitedly to his father, the bullfrog, and said, "I have just seen the biggest frog in the world!"

"Humph!" said the bullfrog, "Was he as big as me?" and he puffed himself up.

"Oh, much bigger than that!" said the little frog.

"Was he THIS big," said the bullfrog, puffing himself up even larger.

"Much, much bigger than you!" said the little frog.

"Ridiculous!" said the bullfrog, who fancied himself much more important than he was. "He couldn't be bigger than me! I'm the oldest frog in the pond. I was here first! Was he bigger than THIS?"

He puffed and puffed himself up so much...he burst!

The Pitcher and the Crow



There once was a crow who was terribly thirsty. He noticed a bit of water at the bottom of a tall clay pitcher. Now, his beak was too wide and the pitcher too thin to poke his thirsty tongue down in.

"What shall I do?" thought the crow. "I'll think and think! I must get myself a drink!"

"Ah HA!" exclaimed crow, as an idea came to him.

He took a pebble in his beak and dropped it over the pitcher's brim. Plop! Plop! He dropped two more in. On and on he went. One by one the pebbles fell, slowly making the water swell until it was easily within reach of his thirsty tongue.

"AHHHH!" he said as he took a drink, "No problem's too big when I think and think."

Aesop's ABC

Ancient Fables Retold by Heather Forest

© Heather Forest 2008

Quarrelsome Children



There once was a man who had quarrelsome children. Even on his dying day they bickered.

"My last wish," he said, "is for you to bring me a bundle of sticks."

When this was done, he gave each child one and said, "Take your solitary twig in hand and break it."

Crack! Crack! went the dry, old wood as each child broke a solitary twig.

"Now," he said, "bind them together. Tie them, and you'll see how much stronger your brittle twig can be."

The old man passed away. His children never forgot that day. Though they each lived separate, distant lives, Each sister, Each brother, In times of trouble they bonded together like a bundle of sticks, Giving strength to one another.

Running For His Life



One day a hound dog went hunting by himself in the woods. He spotted a rabbit in the underbrush and chased him out into the open. The rabbit darted this way and that. The dog followed. The rabbit ran, with the dog at his heels, around trees and through an open field.

When the dog began to tire of the chase, the rabbit, with one last burst of energy, dashed into the thicket and escaped to safety.

As the dog turned back for home, a goat herder who had seen the chase jeered at him, saying, "Some hunter you are! You let that rabbit get the best of you!"

"You forget," replied the tired dog, "about the rabbit's strife! I was only running for my supper. He was running for his life!"

Aesop's ABC

Ancient Fables Retold by Heather Forest

© Heather Forest 2008

Sour Grapes



A hungry fox noticed a juicy bunch of grapes growing high on a grapevine. He leaped. He snapped. Drooling, he jumped to reach them, but try as he might, he could not obtain the tasty prize.

Disappointed by the fruitless efforts he'd made to get the grapes that day, he said, with a shrug, to comfort himself, "Oh, they were probably sour anyway!"

The Tortoise and the Hare



There once was a speedy hare who bragged about how fast he could run. Tired of hearing him boast, Slow and Steady, the tortoise, challenged him to a race. All the animals in the forest gathered to watch.

Hare ran down the road for a while and then and paused to rest. He looked back at Slow and Steady and cried out, "How do you expect to win this race when you are walking along at your slow, slow pace?"

Hare stretched himself out alongside the road and fell asleep, thinking, "There is plenty of time to relax."

Slow and Steady walked and walked. He never, ever stopped until he came to the finish line.

The animals who were watching cheered so loudly for Tortoise, they woke up Hare.

Hare stretched and yawned and began to run again, but it was too late. Tortoise was over the line.

After that, Hare always reminded himself, "Don't brag about your lightning pace, for Slow and Steady won the race!"

Aesop's ABC

Ancient Fables Retold by Heather Forest

© Heather Forest 2008

Under the Lion's Skin



A donkey found a lion's skin and put it on. In this frightening disguise, he grazed in a farmer's field. He amused himself by frightening all the animals he met. He felt so powerful!

Along came a fox. The donkey under the lion's skin tried to frighten him. The donkey stood tall under the skin and let out a sound that he thought would resemble a roar. Alas, his donkey voice was all that was heard.

The fox laughed and said, "Silly donkey, if you really want to frighten me you'll have to disguise your bray. Clothes MAY disguise a fool you know. But, his words always give him away!"

Visiting the Lion's Cave



There once was a lion who was too lazy to hunt for his food. He pretended to be very sick and announced to all the animals that he was soon to die.

"Please," he said, "come visit me in my cave and bid me goodbye."

The lion looked so weak and helpless, the animals felt sorry for him. One by one the visitors came. One by one, the lion ate his fill of them!

When fox arrived to pay his last respects, he stopped in front of the cave's entrance and looked closely at the ground.

"Come in quickly, I am dying!" cried the sly lion, impatiently.

"No," said the fox, who was equally clever, "You'll not have ME for a visitor, though you moan and pout. While I see many footprints going into your cave, NONE are coming out!"

Aesop's ABC

Ancient Fables Retold by Heather Forest

© Heather Forest 2008

The Wolf and the Goat



A wolf saw a goat grazing at the edge of a high cliff. The wolf smacked his lips at the thought of a fine goat dinner.

"My dear friend," said the wolf in his sweetest voice, "aren't you afraid you will fall down from that cliff? Come down here and graze on this fine grass beside me on safe, level ground."

"No, thank you," said the goat.

"Well then," said the wolf, "aren't you cold up there in the wind? You would be warmer grazing down here beside me in this sheltered area."

"No, thank you," said the goat.

"But the grass tastes better down here!" said the exasperated wolf, "Why dine alone?"

"My dear wolf," the goat finally said, "are you quite sure that it is MY dinner you are worrying about and not your own?"

X Marks the Spot



There was once a farmer who had lazy sons. On his deathbed he told them that there was a treasure buried in the vineyard. He encouraged them to search for it after he had passed away.

The sons thought that there must be a box of gold and jewels buried in the ground and so they dug up every inch of the vineyard trying to find the treasure spot! After many years of searching, they never found the spot where any treasure was hidden. However, all of their digging effectively cultivated the ground in the vineyard. Soon the grapevines produced such abundant fruit that the three lazy sons grew wealthy, unwittingly, from their own hard work!

Aesop's ABC

Ancient Fables Retold by Heather Forest
© Heather Forest 2008

You Are Beautiful As You Are



There was once a crow who did not like his feathers.

"I wish I were a peacock!" he would say.

"You are beautiful as you are!" the other crows insisted.

"How plain and dull you seem to me!" he'd complain, and fly off to admire peacocks.

The peacocks strutted about with their colorful tail feathers outstretched. To the delight of the crow, some of the peacock feathers lay on the ground when the peacocks left.

Crow flew down to the ground and stuck the feathers into his wings and tail. He attached a few sticking up from his head.

"Now I am as beautiful as a peacock," he said.

But, when he went to join them in their strutting, the peacocks poked him and pecked him. What a fuss!

"You are not a peacock," they said, "Don't imitate us!"

Bruised and still dragging some broken peacock feathers in his tail, he returned home.

After all his insults, no one wanted his company!

As he sat alone, the other crows said, "It's foolish to try and be what you're not. Learn to love the feathers you've got!"

Aesop's ABC

Ancient Fables Retold by Heather Forest

© Heather Forest 2008

Zig-Zag Walk



Under the waves at the bottom of the sea, a mother crab scolded her daughter.

"Why are you scurrying side to side in that ridiculous zig-zag walk of yours? Come forward! Walk straight, like other creatures do!"

"But mother," squeaked the little crab, "I learned to walk from you! If you want something different of me...change the example I see!"

And with that, the little crab zig-zig-zig zagged away.

Aesop's ABC

Ancient Fables Retold by Heather Forest
© Heather Forest 2008

ABOUT the AUTHOR

Heather Forest

For the past thirty years, Heather Forest has shared her repertoire of world tales told in an interweave of original music and the spoken and sung word with audiences of all ages in theatres, schools, literature conferences, and storytelling festivals throughout the United States and abroad. An award winning author and recording artist, she has published seven children's picture books, two folktale anthologies, eight audio recordings of storytelling and a popular educational web site Story Arts Online <http://www.storyarts.org>. Ms. Forest is a recipient of the Circle of Excellence Award presented by the National Storytelling Network, U.S.A., and has been an adjunct professor of Oral Tradition at Southern Connecticut State University. She holds a masters degree in Storytelling and a Ph.D. in Leadership and Change. Her storytelling has been featured at the National Storytelling Festival, Tennessee, The Museum of Modern Art, N.Y., the Discovery Theatre at the Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C., the Sidmouth International Folk Festival, England, Tales of Graz, Austria and at the Glistening Waters Storytelling Festival, New Zealand.