



Aesop's Fables

*Language Activities
for the ESL Classroom*

Intermediate Level

Lucy Carter

Preface

SAMPLE PAGES

This is a book of classroom activities for students of English at an intermediate level. All activities are based on Aesop's Fables, a collection of stories most of which date from the 6th century BC. Some of the fables may be familiar to you from your childhood.

I have adapted many of the original stories for use in the language classroom. I don't expect teachers to work through the activities from beginning to end - I can hear some students saying "Please, not another fable"! It would be best to treat the book as a source of activities that supplement topics covered in class, or as revision exercises. The activities can also be used as 'fillers' if your lesson plan needs additional activities; most activities are about 10 - 15 minutes in duration although there are some, such as the creative writing exercises, that will last much longer.

I have also included some of the fables, adapted for intermediate level, as additional exercises for teachers to create their own activities for students.

I hope you and your students enjoy the stories and the language activities.

Lucy Carter,
Jakarta

SCHOOL EDITION

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2 Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary

Activity Reading comprehension and vocabulary

Instructions

Copy the text of the two stories and the vocabulary exercises that follow them on the next page

Key

- gorging (line 1) to swallow food greedily
- induce (line 3) to persuade
- beak (line 6) a bird's bill or nose
- gratitude (line 11) thankfulness
- rough and ready (line 13) rough in manner but prompt in action
- turned up his nose at (line 16) to express dislike
- put up with (line 17) to tolerate
- feast (line 23) a dinner with large quantities of food
- scamper (line 27) to run quickly

Teacher Activity ~ Create an activity from this fable

The Ant and the Grasshopper

In a field one summer's day a grasshopper was hopping about, chirping and singing to its heart's content. An ant passed by, bearing along with great toil an ear of corn he was taking to the nest.

"Why not come and chat with me," said the grasshopper, "instead of toiling in that way?"

"I am helping to lay up food for the winter," said the ant, "and recommend you to do the same."

"Why bother about winter?" said the grasshopper; we have got plenty of food at present." But the ant went on its way and continued its toil. When the winter came the grasshopper had no food and found itself dying of hunger, while it saw the ants distributing every day corn and grain from the stores they had collected in the summer. Then the grasshopper knew:

It is best to prepare for the days of necessity.

Skim read the following stories, then read in detail to answer the questions that follow them.

The Wolf and the Crane

- 1 A wolf had been gorging on an animal he had killed, when suddenly a small bone in the meat stuck
2 in his throat and he could not swallow it. He soon felt terrible pain in his throat, and ran up and
3 down groaning and looking for something to relieve the pain. He tried to induce every one he met
4 to remove the bone. "I would give anything," said he, "if you would take it out." At last the crane
5 agreed to try, and told the wolf to lie on his side and open his jaws as wide as he could. Then the
6 crane put its long neck down the wolf's throat, and with its beak loosened the bone, till at last it got
7 it out.
- 8 "Will you kindly give me the reward you promised?" said the crane. The wolf grinned and showed
9 his teeth and said: "Be content. You have put your head inside a wolf's mouth and taken it out
10 again in safety; that ought to be reward enough for you."
11 *Gratitude and greed go not together.*

The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse

- 13 Once upon a time a town mouse went on a visit to his cousin in the country. He was rough and
14 ready, this cousin, but he loved his town friend and made him heartily welcome. Beans and bacon,
15 cheese and bread, were all he had to offer, but he offered them freely. The town mouse rather
16 turned up his long nose at this country fare, and said: "I cannot understand, cousin, how you can
17 put up with such poor food as this, but of course you cannot expect anything better in the country;
18 come you with me and I will show you how to live. When you have been in town a week you will
19 wonder how you could ever have stood a country life."
- 20 No sooner said than done the two mice set off for the town and arrived at the town mouse's
21 residence late at night. "You will want some refreshment after our long journey," said the polite
22 town mouse, and took his friend into the grand dining-room. There they found the remains of a fine
23 feast, and soon the two mice were eating up jellies and cakes and all that was nice.
- 24 Suddenly they heard growling and barking. "What is that?" said the country mouse. "It is only the
25 dogs of the house," answered the other. "Only!" said the country mouse. "I do not like that music at
26 my dinner." Just at that moment the door flew open, in came two huge dogs, and the two mice had
27 to scamper down and run off. "Good-bye, cousin," said the country mouse, "What! going so soon?"
28 said the other. "Yes," he replied; "Better beans and bacon in peace than cakes and ale in fear."
29

Use the context and any other clues to help you match these words and phrases with their meanings from the list below :

gorging (line 1), induce (line 3), beak (line 6), gratitude (line 11),
rough and ready (line 13), turned up his nose at (line 16),
put up with (line 17), feast (line 23), scamper (line 27).

Meanings

rough in manner but prompt in action	to swallow food greedily
to express dislike	a bird's bill or nose
thankfulness	a dinner with large quantities of food
to persuade	to tolerate
to run quickly	

6 Creative Writing

Activity An exercise in creative writing - writing a story from guidelines

Instructions

This is an exercise in creative writing. Write up the rules on the board or dictate the following. The rules for writing are that the story must :

- begin with this sentence:
The frogs were living as happy as could be in a marshy swamp that suited them fine.
- end with this sentence:
By the time the frogs repented it was too late.
- include the answers to the following questions
Why did the frogs want to have a King?
Where did the log come from?
What did the frogs do with the log?
Why were the frogs unhappy with the log?
What did the stork do when it arrived?
- have a suitable title.
- be between 250 and 300 words in length.

Pre-teach *repent* (expressing regret), *log* (trunk of a cut down tree), *stork* (a bird)

Answer Key

There are no correct answers to this exercise. As an extra activity students could exchange stories and read and correct them. The full text of the fable upon which this exercise follows.

The Frogs Desiring a King

The frogs were living as happy as could be in a marshy swamp that suited them fine. They went splashing about caring for nobody and nobody troubled them. But some of them thought that this was not right, that they should have a king and a proper constitution, so they determined to send up a petition to Jove to give them what they wanted. "Mighty Jove," they cried, "send unto us a king that will rule over us and keep us in order."

Jove laughed at their croaking, and threw down into the swamp a huge log, which came splashing into the swamp. The frogs were frightened out of their lives by the commotion made in their midst, and all rushed to the bank to look at the horrible monster; but after a time, seeing that it did not move, one or two of the boldest of them ventured out towards the log, and even dared to touch it; still it did not move. Then the greatest hero of the frogs jumped upon the log and commenced dancing up and down upon it, thereupon all the frogs came and did the same; and for some time the frogs went about their business every day without taking the slightest notice of their new King log lying in their midst.

But this did not suit them, so they sent another petition to Jove, and said to him, "We want a real king; one that will really rule over us." Now this made Jove angry, so he sent among them a big Stork that soon set to work gobbling them all up. By the time the frogs repented it was too late. Moral of the story? Better no rule than a cruel rule.

9 Mixed-up Sentences

Activity Putting sentences in the correct sequence

Instructions

Copy the mixed-up sentences on the following page. Students work in groups to put the sentences in the correct order.

To make the exercise more challenging for the more advanced students in the group you could combine the sentences in this exercise with the sentences in the previous exercise by copying the sentences in both exercises, cutting into strips and mixing up the sentences.

Key

The Forester and the Snake

One winter's day a forester was tramping home from his work when he saw something black lying on the snow.

When he came closer he saw it was a snake which looked dead.

He took it up and put it inside his shirt to keep warm while he hurried home.

As soon as he got indoors he put the snake down on the hearth before the fire.

The children watched it and saw it slowly come to life again.

Then one of them stooped down to stroke it.

The snake raised its head, put out its fangs and was about to sting the child to death.

So the Woodman seized his axe, and with one stroke cut the snake in two.

"Ah," said he, "There's no gratitude from the wicked."

Put the following sentences in their correct order to form a story. One of the sentences is the title, one sentence is the moral of the story.

Then one of them stooped down to stroke it.

"Ah," said he, "There's no gratitude from the wicked."

The snake raised its head, put out its fangs and was about to sting the child to death.

When he came closer he saw it was a snake which looked dead.

The Forester and the Snake

As soon as he got indoors he put the snake down on the hearth before the fire.

So the Woodman seized his axe, and with one stroke cut the snake in two.

The children watched it and saw it slowly come to life again.

One winter's day a forester was tramping home from his work when he saw something black lying on the snow.

He took it up and put it inside his shirt to keep warm while he hurried home.

10 The Extra Word

Activity Identify the extra word that shouldn't be there.

Instructions

Copy the instructions and the text of the story below. Pre-teach *bill* (long beak).

Answer Key

The extra words that should be removed are shown in bold.

The Fox and the Stork

At one time the Fox and the Stork were very good friends.
The Fox invited the Stork to **the** dinner, and as a joke put nothing before her but some soup in a very shallow dish. This the Fox could easily drink up, but the Stork could only wet the end of her long bill in it, and left the meal as **more** hungry as when she began.
"I am sorry," said the Fox, "the soup is not **so** to your liking."

"Do not apologise," said the Stork. "I hope you will come and dine with me soon." **When** a day was arranged for the Fox to visit the Stork. When they were seated at the table their dinner was **being** contained in a very long-necked jar with **which** a narrow mouth, into which the Fox could not insert his mouth. All he could manage to do was to lick the outside of the jar. "I will not **make** apologise for the dinner," said the Stork, "one bad turn deserves another."

Read the text below and look carefully at each line. Some of the lines are correct, and some have a word which should not be there. If a line is correct put a tick beside it. If a line has a word that should not be there, cross the word out.

The Fox and the Stork

_____ At one time the Fox and the Stork were very good friends.
_____ The Fox invited the Stork to the dinner, and as a joke put nothing
_____ before her but some soup in a very shallow dish. This the Fox
_____ could easily drink up, but the Stork could only wet the end of her
_____ long bill in it, and left the meal as more hungry as when she began.
_____ "I am sorry," said the Fox, "the soup is not so to your liking."

_____ "Do not apologise," said the Stork. "I hope you will come and dine
_____ with me soon." When a day was arranged for the Fox to visit the Stork.
_____ When they were seated at the table their dinner was being contained in a
_____ very long-necked jar with which a narrow mouth, into which the Fox could
_____ not insert his mouth. All he could manage to do was to lick the
_____ outside of the jar. "I will not make apologise for the dinner," said the Stork,
_____ "one bad turn deserves another."

30 Mixed-up Paragraphs

Activity

Reading comprehension

Instructions

Give a copy of the following page to each student. Allow students time to read the texts.

Key

The Miser and His Gold

Once upon a time there was a miser who used to hide his gold at the foot of a tree in his garden; but every week he used to go and dig it up and gloat over his gains. A robber, who had noticed this, went and dug up the gold and made off with it.

When the miser next came to gloat over his treasures, he found nothing but the empty hole. He tore his hair, and raised such an outcry that all the neighbours came around him, and he told them how he used to come and visit his gold.

"Did you ever take any of it out?" asked one of them. "No," said he, "I only came to look at it."

"Then come again and look at the hole," said a neighbour; "it will do you just as much good - wealth unused might as well not exist."

The Fox Without a Tail

It happened that a fox caught its tail in a trap, and in struggling to release himself lost all of it but the stump. At first he was ashamed to show himself among his fellow foxes.

But at last he determined to put a bolder face upon his misfortune, and summoned all the foxes to a general meeting to consider a proposal which he had to place before them. When they had assembled together the fox proposed that they should all do away with their tails.

He pointed out how inconvenient a tail was when they were pursued by their enemies, the dogs; how much it was in the way when they desired to sit down and hold a friendly conversation with one another.

He failed to see any advantage in carrying about such a useless encumbrance. "That is all very well," said one of the older foxes; "but I do not think you would have recommended us to dispense with our chief ornament if you had not happened to lose it yourself." 'Distrust interested advice' is the moral of this story.

Belling the Cat

Long ago, the mice had a general council to consider what measures they could take to outwit their common enemy, the cat. Some said this, and some said that; but at last a young mouse got up and said he had a proposal to make, which he thought would meet the case.

"You will all agree," said he, "that our chief danger consists in the sly and treacherous manner in which the enemy approaches us. Now, if we could receive some signal of her approach, we could easily escape from her.

I venture, therefore to propose that a small bell be procured, and attached by a ribbon round the neck of the cat. By this means we should always know when she was about, and could easily retire while she was in the neighbourhood."

This proposal met with general applause, until an old mouse got up and said: "That is all very well, but who is to bell the cat?" The mice looked at one another and nobody spoke. Then the old mouse said: "It is easy to propose impossible remedies."

Rearrange the following paragraphs to make three separate stories and choose the correct titles from this list:

Belling the Cat	The Miser and his Cat
The Miser and the Cat	The Fox Without a Tail
The Cat without a Tail	Removing the Cat's Tail
The Miser and his Gold	

"Did you ever take any of it out?" asked one of them. "No," said he, "I only came to look at it."
"Then come again and look at the hole," said a neighbour; "it will do you just as much good - wealth unused might as well not exist."

I venture, therefore to propose that a small bell be procured, and attached by a ribbon round the neck of the cat. By this means we should always know when she was about, and could easily retire while she was in the neighbourhood."

He pointed out how inconvenient a tail was when they were pursued by their enemies, the dogs; how much it was in the way when they desired to sit down and hold a friendly conversation with one another.

It happened that a fox caught its tail in a trap, and in struggling to release himself lost all of it but the stump. At first he was ashamed to show himself among his fellow foxes.

"You will all agree," said he, "that our chief danger consists in the sly and treacherous manner in which the enemy approaches us. Now, if we could receive some signal of her approach, we could easily escape from her.

Once upon a time there was a miser who used to hide his gold at the foot of a tree in his garden; but every week he used to go and dig it up and gloat over his gains. A robber, who had noticed this, went and dug up the gold and made off with it.

Long ago, the mice had a general council to consider what measures they could take to outwit their common enemy, the cat. Some said this, and some said that; but at last a young mouse got up and said he had a proposal to make, which he thought would meet the case.

But at last he determined to put a bolder face upon his misfortune, and summoned all the foxes to a general meeting to consider a proposal which he had to place before them. When they had assembled together the fox proposed that they should all do away with their tails.

He failed to see any advantage in carrying about such a useless encumbrance. "That is all very well," said one of the older foxes; "but I do not think you would have recommended us to dispense with our chief ornament if you had not happened to lose it yourself." 'Distrust interested advice' is the moral of this story.

When the miser next came to gloat over his treasures, he found nothing but the empty hole. He tore his hair, and raised such an outcry that all the neighbours came around him, and he told them how he used to come and visit his gold.

This proposal met with general applause, until an old mouse got up and said: "That is all very well, but who is to bell the cat?" The mice looked at one another and nobody spoke. Then the old mouse said: "It is easy to propose impossible remedies."

31 What Version Is Correct?

Activity

Reading comprehension and information exchange

Instructions

In this activity students work in pairs. Each student is given a different version of a story. The two versions differ in a number of words, but only one version of the story is correct for each difference. Give one student version A and the other version B. Allow about 5 minutes for each student to silently read through his/her version of the story. Tell the students that as they read through their versions they may notice some text that doesn't quite fit or appears illogical. They should just make a note of it at this stage and continue to read the rest of their versions.

The students then work in pairs taking it in turns to read their sentences to each other. Where there is a difference they must decide which version is correct. Remind students that version A could be correct for some differences and version B correct for other differences.

You can start students off with the first difference in the first sentence as an example; Version A refers to an eagle, version B refers to an aircraft. In this case version A is correct because an aircraft cannot be wounded or killed.

Key

At the end of the activity check the students' answers against this correct version:

The Eagle and the Arrow

An **eagle** was soaring through the **sky** when suddenly it heard the **whizz** of an arrow as it pierced its skin. It realised that it had been **mortally wounded**. Slowly it **fluttered** down to the earth, with its **blood** pouring out of it. Looking down upon the arrow with which it had been pierced, it found that the **shaft** of the **arrow** had been built with one of its own feathers. "Alas!" it cried, as it **died**, "We often give our **enemies** the means to destroy us."

Teacher Activity ~ Create an activity from this fable

The Mule's Brains

The lion and the fox went hunting together. The lion, on the advice of the fox, sent a message to the mule, proposing to make an alliance between their two families. The mule came to the place of meeting, overjoyed at the prospect of a royal alliance. But when he came there the lion simply pounced on the mule and killed it, and said to the fox: "Here is our dinner for to-day. Watch you here while I go and have a nap. Woe betide you if you touch my prey." The lion went away and the fox waited; but finding that his master did not return, ventured to take out the brains of the mule and ate them up. When the lion came back he soon noticed the absence of the brains, and asked the fox in a terrible voice: "What have you done with the brains?"

"Brains, your Majesty! it had none, or it would never have fallen into your trap."

Wit has always an answer ready.

Version A - Student 1

Do not show this to the other student. Spend a few minutes reading the text then work with the other student taking it in turns to read aloud each other's sentences. If some of the sentences are not the same then decide whose version is correct. Sometimes this version will be correct, sometimes the other version will be correct. There will be clues in the story to help you decide.

An aircraft was soaring through the sky when suddenly it heard the whizz of an arrow as it pierced its skin. It realised that it had been mortally wounded. Slowly it floated down to the earth, with its fuel pouring out of it. Looking down upon the arrow with which it had been pierced, it found that the shaft of the arrow had been built with one of its own feathers. "Alas!" it cried, as it died, "We often give our enemies the means to destroy us."

Version B - Student 2

Do not show this to the other student. Spend a few minutes reading the text then work with the other student taking it in turns to read aloud each other's sentences. If some of the sentences are not the same then decide whose version is correct. Sometimes this version will be correct, sometimes the other version will be correct. There will be clues in the story to help you decide.

An eagle was soaring through the sea when suddenly it heard the bang of an arrow as it pierced its skin. It realised that it had been killed. Slowly it fluttered down to the earth, with its blood pouring out of it. Looking down upon the arrow with which it had been pierced, it found that the tip of the missile had been built with one of its own feathers. "Alas!" it cried, as it flew away, "We often give our friends the means to destroy us."

32 Telling A Story

Activity

Listening comprehension and information exchange

Instructions

Select four of your best students and send them outside the room for about 15 minutes with a separate exercise to keep them busy. While they are outside the room dictate the story below, to the rest of the group. Explain any unknown vocabulary.

Choose or ask a student to prepare to read the story aloud to the first of the group of four (student A) when he/she is invited back into to the room. Student A listens to the story and is allowed to ask two questions about it. Student B is invited into the room and A tells the story to B, who in turn is allowed to ask two questions if necessary. C is invited in and the process is repeated with B telling the story to C, who is also allowed to ask two questions. Finally D is called back in and C tells the story to D. (Students A, B, C and D should not make notes on what they hear).

In the meantime the group in the room makes notes under three headings: 'information added', 'information left out' and 'information changed', as the story telling progresses from A to D.

At the end write up the three headings on the board and ask students to volunteer what was added, omitted and changed.

Key

There are no correct answers as such. The exercise is designed as an exercise in listening skills and information exchange. Here is the story to dictate.

The Milkmaid and Her Bucket

Patty the Milkmaid was going to market carrying her milk in a bucket on her head. As she went along she began calculating what she would do with the money she would get for the milk. "I'll buy some chickens from Farmer Brown," said she, "and they will lay eggs each morning, which I will sell to the parson's wife. With the money that I get from the sale of these eggs I'll buy myself a new blue cotton dress and matching hat; and when I go to town, all the young men will come up and chat with me. Polly Shaw will be jealous, but I don't care. I shall just look at her and toss my head like this." As she spoke she tossed her head back, the bucket fell off it, and the milk was spilt. So she had to go home and tell her mother what had occurred.

"Ah, my child," said the mother, "You should never count your chickens before they are hatched."

Teacher Activity ~ Create an activity from this fable

The Trumpeter Taken Prisoner

A trumpeter during a battle ventured too near the enemy and was captured by them. They were about to proceed to put him to death when he begged them to hear his plea for mercy. "I do not fight," said he, "and indeed carry no weapon; I only blow this trumpet, and surely that cannot harm you; then why should you kill me?" "You may not fight yourself," said the others, "but you encourage and guide your men to the fight." *Words may be deeds.*