

2. Aesop's Fables



Fables are short stories that have a moral or message for us – something to learn and keep in mind as we grow up. Most of the fables have animal characters who think and act just like human beings.

It is believed that many of the fables were first told by a wise person called Aesop. Aesop lived hundreds of years ago in a country called Greece. His stories became so popular that people passed them on from generation to generation. Many proverbs and sayings that we use today are based on these fables. Here are two well-known fables.



I. The Stag at the Pool

One day, a beautiful stag came to a pool of clear water. As he bent down to drink, he saw his own reflection in the water. He was delighted with what he saw. Instead of drinking water, he kept looking at his own reflection.

“How handsome I look!” he said to himself. “How beautiful are these curving antlers! How they add to my beauty! How graceful they look!”

Then he moved nearer and saw his legs reflected in the pool. He was quite disgusted. “Look at my legs! Ugh! They are so ugly! All spindly with small feet. How I wish that nature had given me legs worthy of my stately antlers!”



As he was brooding in this way, the stag heard an arrow going swish across the pool. At the same time, he picked up the scent of hunters. With a quick turn, he bounded away. His legs carried him swiftly into the forest. The hunters were hot on his trail but they were no match for his speed. Soon the stag left the hunters far behind.

Safe and out of the hunters' reach, the stag slowed down. Suddenly, without realizing it, he walked into a thicket. There were trees with strong branches growing close together. And alas! The same antlers of which he was so proud got caught in the thick growth.

The stag tried to shake himself free, but the more he struggled, the more entangled his antlers got in the branches.

Once again, the stag could hear the hunters drawing close, and grew afraid. At last, with great difficulty, he managed to free his antlers and bounded away.



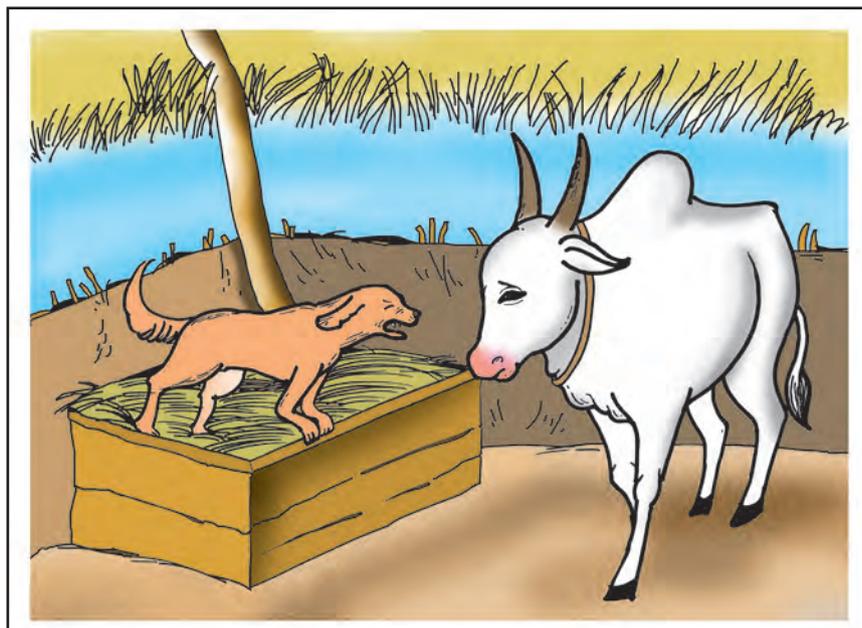
“I realize now that my ugly feet saved my life. I was so proud of these handsome antlers, but they would have been the cause of my death. Very often, we dislike the very things that are most useful to us.”

II. The Dog in the Manger

Once a dog was looking for a nice and comfortable place to lie down. He came to the manger of an ox and jumped onto the hay to rest.

It was a very hot afternoon. After a while, the ox returned from the field. He had worked hard in the hot sun and was now quite hungry. He stood in his stall and was planning to eat the hay that was put in the manger for him. However, when he reached for the hay, the dog saw him. Standing in the manger, he began to bark loudly at the ox. Each time that the ox came near the hay, the dog snarled, barked and snapped at the ox. He would not allow the ox to eat his hay.

Oxen are generally peace-loving and patient animals. But finally the ox got upset and spoke firmly, “Dog, if you wanted to share my dinner with me, I would not mind it. But you neither eat the hay nor allow me to enjoy it. It is of no use to you. Then why don’t you let me have my favourite food ? Don’t begrudge others what you don’t enjoy yourself.”



- **stag** : a male deer. ● **spindly** : very long and thin. ● **stately** : grand.
- **brooding** : thinking sadly for a long time. ● **hot on his trail** : very close to him, about to catch him. ● **thicket** : When many trees, bushes, etc. grow close together, they form a thicket. ● **manger** : long open box in a cattle shed. Cattle eat hay kept for them in the manger. ● **hay** : cut and dried grass used as food for animals. ● **stall** : part of a cattle shed or stable. Generally, each animal has one stall for itself. ● **begrudge** : be unwilling to give, be unhappy that someone is getting something.

Things to do :

1. Answer the following questions :
 - (a) Name the person who first told these fables.
 - (b) What did the stag like about himself ? Why ?
 - (c) What was the stag unhappy with ? Why ?
 - (d) What did the dog do when the ox went near the manger ?
 - (e) Write the message of each of these two stories.
2. Read aloud the following speeches from the lesson.
 - (a) What the stag said when he saw his reflection.
 - (b) What the stag said at the end.
 - (c) What the ox said to the dog in the manger.
3. Find the smaller words hidden in the following words :

* reflection	* delighted	* graceful	* hunter	* thicket
* growth	* dislike	* afternoon	* firmly	* upset.
4. Find synonyms for :

* delighted	* beautiful	* disgusted	* bounded
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5. The stag saw his reflection in water. Name at least three things in which one may see a reflection. Name three things that do not reflect anything.
6. Find and write the names of ten countries.
7. With the help of your teacher, make a collection of idioms and proverbs that mention birds and animals.

Example : To let the cat out of the bag.

Barking dogs seldom bite.