A Creative Approach to the Classical Progymnasmata

Writing & Rhetoric

Fable

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Writing & Rhetoric: Fable

Version 1.0

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Fable

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Typical Teaching Week

Veteran teachers know that rarely is there anything typical about a teaching week. These guidelines are intended to help bring some predictability to lesson planning. Although the parts of speech and other elements of grammar are important aspects of this course, its primary focus is writing and rhetoric—as the name implies. It is recommended that teachers alternate between a course in grammar one week and *Writing & Rhetoric: Fable* the next week.

Day One

1. The teacher models fluency by reading the text aloud while students follow along silently.
2. Students break off into pairs and reread the text to each other. In the case of longer fables, students can read in sections. Encouragement should be given to students to read with drama and flair where appropriate.
3. "Tell It Back" (Narration) and "Talk About It" should immediately follow the reading of the text, while the fable is still fresh in the students' minds. "Talk About It" is designed to help students analyze the meaning of texts and to see analogous situations, both in the world and in their own lives. Narration, the process of "telling back," can be done in pairs or by selecting individuals to narrate to the entire class. Playacting the story from memory is another possible form of narration. (Note: Solo students can tell back the story into a recording device or to an instructor.) The process of narration is intended to improve comprehension and long-term memory.
4. "Go Deeper" comprehension exercises follow each text. They can help students better understand the selection as they work with vocabulary, main ideas, and character traits.

Day Two

1. Optional: The teacher can appoint a student or the entire class to read the text again.
2. Students then work with the text through the "Writing Time" exercises. In ancient times, at this level, the primary exercise was to summarize or amplify the length of the narrative. Other exercises include emulating a particular sentence, changing part of a story, or writing an entirely new story. Student work need not be completely original, but it should show some effort of thought.

Day Three or Four[1]

1. A time of sharing work can wrap up each lesson. In order to build confidence in public speaking, students should be encouraged to read their work aloud—either in pairs or to the entire class.
2. The "Speak It" section creates opportunities for students to recite, to playact, and to share their work aloud.

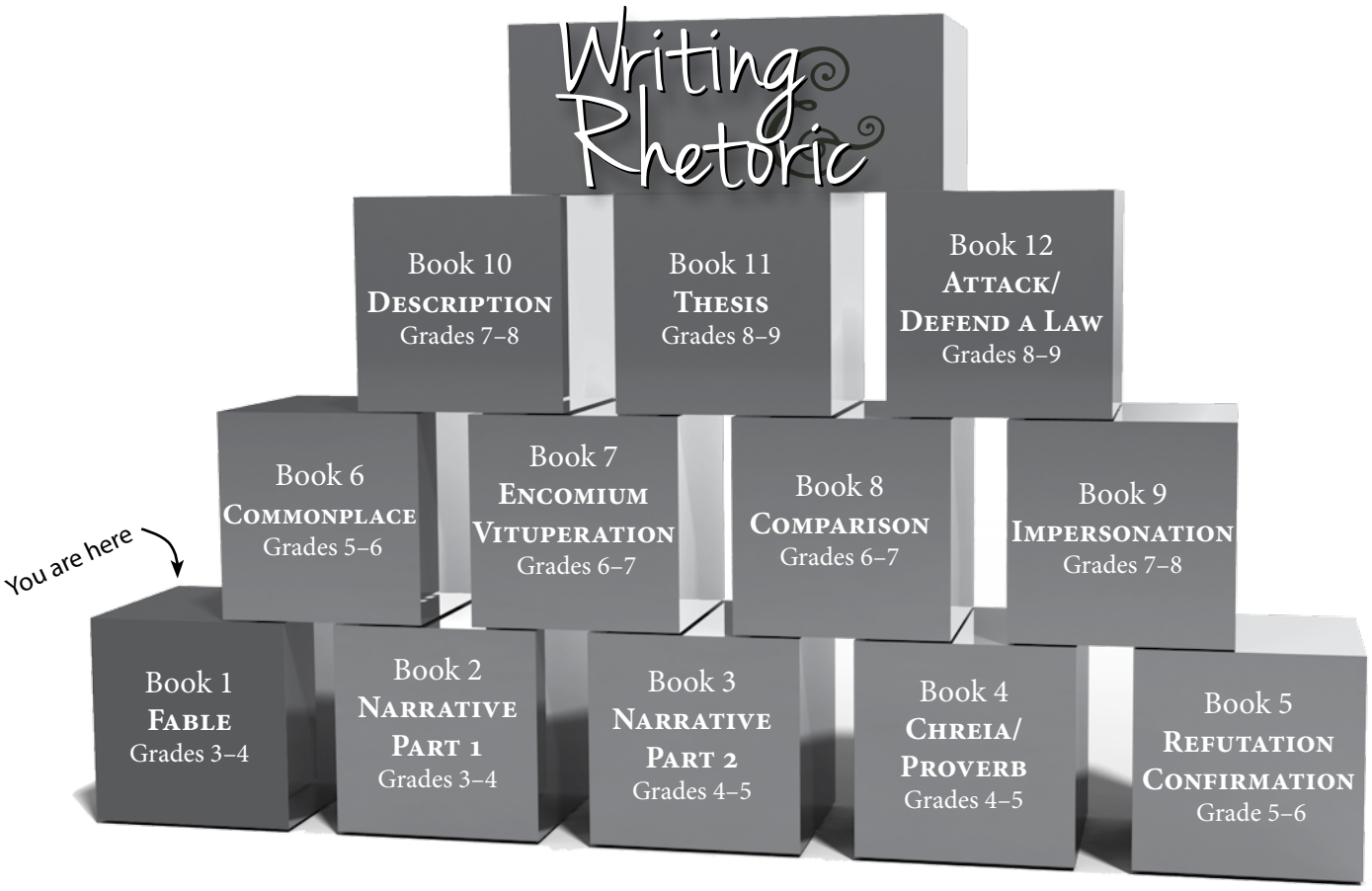
1. The number of days per week assigned to the lessons is four so that you have some flexibility according to the pace and level of depth that you take advantage of with your students.

Introduction to Students

We are glad you are studying writing and rhetoric and we think you will be glad, too! In the Writing & Rhetoric series, we use whole stories to teach you how to write. First you read and think about the stories, then you have the chance to rewrite them, making them longer or shorter. Eventually, after you learn how to do that, you will write your own story. By that time, your mind will be filled with characters, words, events, and even types of sentences that will help you write.

Often, when people are taught to write, they are asked to come up with material from thin air, or ex nihilo, which is a Latin phrase that means "out of nothing." For instance, many students return to school in the fall and are asked to write about their summer vacation. This can be fun, but we believe the best writing skills are developed when you have many ideas, words, and examples that show you a lot of ways in which other writers have written about a subject. In a way, these other writers become your writing guides. Frequently, when a writer doesn't have such a guide, he or she gets frustrated. Even famous writers have had such guides—often their work resembles the writing style of their teachers or guides.

Now, let's get writing!



The Writing & Rhetoric series provides students with forms and models of excellent writing that students can imitate on their path to masterful writing. The first book in the series recovers this proven method of teaching writing, using fables to teach beginning writers the craft of writing well.

This is the first in a series of twelve books that will train students over six years, starting in grades three or four and up.

Introduction

Writing Happily

Where We Are Now

When it comes to writing, some students see the process as sweet delight. That was my experience. I always loved taking a blank sheet of paper and transforming it into something magical: a carnival twinkling in the night, a city street shining with rain and reflecting gas lamps, an avalanche flying down a spire of rock. But I know that writing is not a magical world for many children or even some adults.

When I served as a writing instructor at the University of Southern California (USC), I saw firsthand the failure of writing instruction at our primary and secondary schools. Hardly a day went by that I wasn't grading a stack of papers, and the torment, the agony, of writing seemed to writhe through the pages.

Many of those college students had difficulty writing grammatically correct and coherent paragraphs—let alone entire essays, persuasively written. These were smart students from privileged backgrounds. So how did they get to college with such meager writing skills? What was happening in school or at home to sabotage the development of writing? Something was clearly not working.

Some years after teaching at USC, I helped to establish The Oaks Academy in the inner city of Indianapolis. Our school has grown from a modest fifty students in 1998 to 400-plus students today. At The Oaks, our mission is "to provide a rich, classical education to children of diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds." Our diversity includes children who grow up in highly involved families as well as children who have limited access to opportunity and must often fend for themselves academically.

As director of curriculum, I was determined to find a writing program that served the needs of all of our students. I wanted a program that combined the best modern practices with the principles of classical education as defined by such disparate educators as the Roman rhetorician Quintilian and nineteenth-century British reformer Charlotte Mason. I felt strongly that students could be confident, persuasive writers by the eighth grade if they received the right combination of models and practice. Above all, I wanted to avoid the wasted years that led to faltering communication in college and beyond.

I examined quite a few programs. Each in its own way seemed to be lacking—both the modern courses and those purporting to be classically inspired. Nothing seemed to be "just right." Some programs were difficult to use. Others seemed too frivolous on the one hand or too heavy on the other. Still others lacked the necessary incremental steps.

The book you have in your hand is the fruit of my dissatisfaction. This is a curriculum built on the solid foundations of the past and framed with the vitality of the present. This is a curriculum that has been tested by ancient, medieval, and modern kids, and proven reliable for the ages. Along with caring teachers and a diet of good books, the Writing & Rhetoric series has taken the young people of The Oaks, kids from all sorts of advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds, and shaped them into fine communicators. As a current eighth-grade teacher, I am often delighted by the rhetorical firepower in my classroom.

Imitation as a Foundation for Learning Writing

An examination of the theory and practice of modern composition reveals some obvious problems. Too often students are asked to brainstorm, "prewrite," or "freewrite" according to their personal interests. This means, in essence, that they are supposed to conjure ideas out of thin air. When faced with a blank piece of paper, many students naturally draw a blank. They lack a conversation in their heads about where to begin. Good writing requires content. It abhors a vacuum.

Students are also expected to write with no clear model before them. Modern composition scolds traditional writing instruction as rote and unimaginative. It takes imitation to task for a lack of freedom and personal expression. And yet effective communication from writer to reader always requires some sort of form and structure. Many of history's greatest writers learned by imitation. Benjamin Franklin, for example, taught himself to write by studying classic books and copying whole passages verbatim. He would then put the book aside and try to reconstruct the passage from memory.

Today's emphasis on originality and creativity has failed. When students lack a form by which to express their ideas, their creativity lacks vitality. As Alexander Pope tells us in his "An Essay on Criticism": "True Ease in Writing comes from Art, not Chance, / As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance." In other words, writing takes the same kind of determined study as ballet or diving. Creativity uses conventional form as a stage or a springboard from which to launch grand jetés and somersaults.

But there's yet another problem. Too often students are expected to tackle complex writing assignments without learning the necessary intermediate steps. Without due concern, teachers require summer vacation narratives, persuasive letters, research papers, and poetic descriptions. All of these forms require skills that must be developed in stages. The assumption is that because most everyone can speak English well enough to be understood, and form letters with a pencil, that everyone should be able to write well. And yet how many of us would expect a child to sit at a piano, without piano lessons, and play a concerto? How many of us would expect a child with a hammer and a chisel and a block of marble to carve the statue of David as well as Michelangelo?

Writing is never automatic. The skills of the trade will not miraculously materialize somewhere along the school way. They take years to master. This is because writing demands thoughtfulness, organization, grammatical skill, rhetorical skill, and an ear for the English language. Most children have a natural inclination for one or two of these skills. Rarely do they have a knack for all. The other skills need to be developed and matured.

When it comes down to it, writing is simply thinking on paper. Or thinking in some digital realm. Writing is thought translated to symbols—the symbolic language of the alphabet. The difficulty lies in the process of translation. I may picture a face or a waterfall clearly in my mind. It's quite another thing to describe the face or waterfall articulately in writing. I may have beautiful arguments on the tip of my tongue for buying a Great Dane puppy, but can I make the case persuasively on a piece of paper? The thinking comes first; the writing comes second. Both need to mature together.

What Is to Be Done

If we have lost our way, it rarely helps to plunge blindly forward. It often helps to retrace our steps. And so it is with writing. We have much to learn from the wisdom of the ages. The Greeks developed a system of persuasive speaking known as rhetoric. The Romans, who came later, were also in love with rhetoric, but they took it to the next level. In order to prepare their young students for dazzling oration, the Romans invented a complementary system of persuasive writing.

This writing system was so dynamic, so effective, that it outlasted the Roman Empire, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance. It even survived into early modern times. This method employed fluent reading, careful listening, models for imitation, and progressive steps. In short, it did many of the things that are out of fashion today, but gave us writers like Cicero and John Milton.

The Romans in the Greek-speaking part of the Empire called their system the *progymnasmata* (pro-gym-naz-ma-ta). This strange, mouthful of a word derives from the same root for exercise as do "gymnasium" and "gymnastics." It means "preliminary exercises." The goal of these lessons is to prepare students for rhetoric, which is the art of writing well and speaking persuasively. This method assumes that students learn best by reading excellent examples of literature and by growing their skills through imitation. Successful writers study great writing. Successful orators study great speeches.

Each exercise is intended to impart a skill (or tool) that can be employed in all kinds of writing and speaking. The exercises are arranged from simple to more complex. What's more, the exercises are cumulative, meaning that later exercises incorporate the skills acquired in preceding exercises. This means, for example, that the skill of reporting or narrating (derived from the narrative exercise) will be regularly practiced and used in future exercises. While engaging in praising an individual (encomium exercise), a student will need to report or narrate an important event or achievement. While comparing two individuals (comparison exercise), a student will often need to praise an individual (encomium).

Studying and acquiring the skills imparted by the *progymnasmata* (hereafter abbreviated *progym*) exercises is much like the way in which we acquire skill in cooking or in a sport like soccer. In the case of cooking, students must first learn the foundational skills of measuring, pouring, and mixing. Then they must learn skills relating to using a frying pan and oven. Each recipe requires the employment of these foundational skills—no matter how complicated it is. A sport like soccer also requires the mastery of basic skills such as kicking, passing, and dribbling. These foundational skills are carried forward into every soccer play and every game strategy.

Think of the *progym* as a step-by-step apprenticeship in the art of writing and rhetoric. What is an apprentice? It is a young person who is learning a skill from a master teacher. Our students will serve as apprentices to the great writers and great stories of history.

Quintilian, one of the master teachers of Rome, tells us that good habits are the foundation of education. In his *Institutio Oratoria*, he writes, "Once a bad habit has become ingrained, it is easier to break than bend. So strong is custom formed in early years." This master teacher also tells us that natural ability is nothing if it is not "cultivated by skillful teaching, persistent study, and continuous and extensive practice in writing, reading, and speaking."

Getting Started

The place to begin is reading, which should be encouraged as one of life's great pleasures from a child's earliest days. Parents should introduce books to babies as soon as they can keep their eyes open. Babies love to hear the sound of their parents' voices. They love the feeling of snuggling in a parent's lap. They love bright books and pictures. Reading helps develop joint attention, which is necessary for any language acquisition. The more a child reads and is read to, the better the foundation for writing. And if a parent feels he or she has been negligent in reading, it's never too late to get started.

The necessary corollary is that we must limit screens: TV, the Internet, and video games should stay off as much as possible! Without realizing it, many parents sabotage the ability of their children to think by allowing an excess of these media. Researchers are telling us, in no uncertain terms, that

an imbalance of electronics can be harmful to clear thinking and focused attention. If children don't have time for books, they don't have time for glowing screens. (Unless, of course, that glowing screen contains a book.) Even boredom and daydreaming can be more productive than too much media exposure! A brain needs rest in order to do the hard work of synthesizing information, problem solving, and making connections between ideas.

Next to reading, it's important for children to get comfortable with the formation of letters. Children should work on penmanship to strengthen neural pathways that allow thinking and writing at the same time. Once writing mechanics come easily, it is much easier to make progress in the complex skill of "thinking on paper." As is often the case, there's more to a fine motor skill than meets the eye. With writing, children must learn to grip the pencil properly, to move their arms and wrists smoothly, and to stay focused on the page. Keep practice sessions short, but frequent—about ten minutes a day for seven- and eight-year-olds.

Before children begin *Writing & Rhetoric: Fable*, they should also know how to identify and create a complete sentence. In other words, they should be able to recognize the presence or absence of a subject or a predicate, and know how to use capital letters and simple punctuation. The sentence is the DNA of written ideas.

Note to Teachers

After researching the historic choices, we have decided to capitalize the names of the animals that act as characters in the fables. Other animals (such as the dog in the newspaper story example given on page 5) are not capitalized in an effort to teach students proper capitalization. Hence, the Lion and the Mouse in the fable in lesson 1 are capitalized because they are characters in the story who are named by their animal name. That is not true of the dog, which is the subject of a newspaper story. We have attempted to consistently represent this throughout the book. You may want to explain the difference in usage to your students.

After This—Formal Rhetoric

The formal study of rhetoric will develop in students a solid theoretical understanding of rhetoric, helping them to better understand why and how to employ the skills they have acquired while studying these exercises. The *progym* will prepare your students to enjoy transforming that blank sheet of paper into a spectacular view from atop the pinnacle of their own imagination.

Best Foot Forward

The *Progym* and the Practice of Modern Writing

Although the *progym* are an ancient method of approaching writing, they are extraordinarily relevant today. This is because modern composition owes almost everything to the *progym*. Modern writing borrows heavily from many of the *progym*'s various exercises. For example, modern stories are essentially unchanged from the ancient fable and narrative forms. Modern expository essays contain elements from the ancient *chreia*, the refutation/confirmation, and other *progym* exercises. Persuasive essays of today are basically the same as the ancient commonplace and thesis exercises. In this series, you can expect your students to grow in all forms of modern composition—narrative, expository, descriptive, and persuasive—while at the same time developing unique rhetorical muscle.

The *progym* cover a host of the new Common Core Standards for English and the Language Arts. In the *Fable* book these include:

- Asking and answering questions to demonstrate understanding of the text
- Recounting stories and fables from diverse cultures
- Describing characters in a story
- Determining the meaning of words and phrases in the text
- Distinguishing one's point of view from the point of view of story characters
- Explaining how an illustration enhances the text
- Providing reasons to support an opinion
- Writing narratives to develop imagined experiences

While the goals of the Common Core Standards are certainly worthwhile, the *progym* derive their strength from the incremental and thorough development of each form of writing. The Writing & Rhetoric series does not skip from form to form and leave the others behind, but rather builds a solid foundation of mastery by blending the forms. For example, no expository essay can truly be effective without description. No persuasive essay can be convincing without narrative. All good narrative writing requires description and all good persuasive writing requires expository elements. Not only do the *progym* demand strong organization, but they retain all of the power of classical rhetoric.

Here is how the progym develop each stage of modern composition:

1. Fable—Narrative
2. Narrative—Narrative with descriptive elements
3. *Chreia* & Proverb—Expository essay with narrative, descriptive, and persuasive elements
4. Refutation & Confirmation—Persuasive essay with narrative, descriptive, and expository elements
5. Commonplace—Persuasive essay with narrative, descriptive, and expository elements
6. Encomium & Vituperation—Persuasive essay with narrative, descriptive, and expository elements
7. Comparison—Comparative essay with narrative, descriptive, expository, and persuasive elements
8. Impersonation & Description—Descriptive essays with narrative, expository, persuasive, and comparative elements

9. Thesis—Persuasive essay with narrative, descriptive, expository, and comparative elements
10. Defend/Attack a Law—Persuasive essay with narrative, descriptive, expository, comparative, and technical elements

As you can see, the *progym* move quickly to establish the importance of one form to another.

Objectives for *Fable*

Here are some of the major objectives for the exercises found in this book:

1. Expose students to the form of fables as well as culturally important examples.
2. Model fluent reading for students and give them practice reading short texts.
3. Give students practice copying texts accurately.
4. Strengthen working memory through dictation, thus improving storage and manipulation of information.
5. Increase understanding of the flexibility and copiousness of language through sentence manipulation.
6. Facilitate student interaction with well-written texts through question and answer and through exercises in summary and amplification.
7. Give students opportunities to creatively imitate sentences and whole fables.
8. Introduce the concepts of main idea and character traits.

Lesson 1

Fabulous Fables

Life has many hard lessons to teach us, doesn't it? A boy who has the habit of telling lies will not be believed, even when he is telling the truth. A girl who bosses her friends around will quickly find herself without any friends at all. A man who boasts about his amazing strength might bump into a much stronger person. A woman who spends more money than she earns will soon find herself with empty pockets. These lessons can be very painful to learn if they actually happen to us. But if we learn our lessons from a clever story, we can avoid some of the pain that comes with growing wiser. A **fable**[1] is just such a story. Its purpose is to save us from painful mistakes.

A fable is a short story that teaches a **moral** lesson. These stories help us learn the difference between right and wrong. But fables are not just lectures such as "don't tell lies" or "don't be stubborn." A fable illustrates the lesson with the foolishness

1. All of the bolded words in this book (other than category titles) are in the glossary at the back of the book.

of people and animals. If no one believes the shepherd boy when wolves attack his sheep, we can easily see the danger of lying. If the donkey breaks his neck by insisting on jumping off the cliff, we can see the danger of stubbornness. Isn't it much more enjoyable to hear a story than to have someone lecture us? That way, we can see a fool in action and not feel so foolish ourselves.

At the end of every fable, we are likely to find a moral. The moral tells us exactly what we need to learn from the fable. Consider the moral a word of friendly advice. Most morals are actually **proverbs**, which are wise sayings that can help us be wiser for the rest of our lives if we live by them.

We can hardly mention the word "fable" without thinking of Aesop. Although we know almost nothing for certain about his life, we do know that Aesop was the greatest of the fable tellers. He is said to have lived sometime in the sixth century before Christ, born a slave in the region of Phrygia in Asia Minor. This same region plays host to the legends of King Midas (of the golden touch) and the city of Gordium, where Alexander the Great is said to have cut through the Gordian Knot. From Phrygia, Aesop was supposedly sold to a master on the island of Samos, where he proved to be so clever that he eventually won his freedom. Ancient historians tell us that he was killed in the city of Delphi. Like Homer 200 years before him, Aesop probably never wrote down his stories. His fables were passed along from storyteller to storyteller and other stories that he never told were credited to him. His fame kept growing, even after he was dead.

The following is one of Aesop's most famous tales. Listen carefully because it will be read only once. Afterwards, you will be asked to tell it back to your teacher, a classmate, or a recording device.

The Lion and the Mouse

A Lion lay asleep in the shady forest, his great head resting on his paws. A timid little Mouse came upon him unexpectedly, and in her fright and haste to get away, she ran across the Lion's nose. Roused from his nap, the Lion laid his huge paw angrily on the tiny creature to kill her.

"Spare me!" begged the poor Mouse. "Please let me go and someday I will surely repay you."

The Lion was much amused to think that a Mouse could ever help him. He laughed so hard that the whole ground shook. But as he was a generous Lion, he let the poor creature go.

Some days later, while stalking his prey in the forest, the Lion was caught in the toils of a hunter's net. Unable to free himself, he filled the forest with his angry

roaring. The Mouse knew the voice and quickly found the Lion struggling in the net. Running to one of the great ropes that bound him, she gnawed it until it parted, and soon the Lion was free.

"You laughed when I said I would repay you," said the Mouse. "Now you see that even a Mouse can help a Lion."

Tell It Back—**Narration**

Narration is telling a story. Tell back the fable of *The Lion and the Mouse* as best as you remember it using your own words. This is a fabulous way to store up the fable in your mind like a precious treasure. It also helps you grow better at organizing your thoughts and at expressing yourself in writing. For further practice, you can record your telling back into your favorite recording device and listen to it afterwards.

- Try to keep the events of the story in their proper order. What happens first? What happens second? And so on.

Here's the first sentence to help you get started:

A Lion lay asleep in the shady forest, his great head resting on his paws.

Talk About It—**Rhetoric Today**

1. The word "fabulous" comes from the Latin word *fabula*, which means "fable." Today we most often mean something excellent or wonderful when we say "fabulous." For instance: "Wow! Those are fabulous sneakers!" But the

original meaning was more like "hard to believe." What are some reasons why a fable is fabulous or "hard to believe"?

2. What do you think would be a good lesson—a good moral—to take away from the fable *The Lion and the Mouse*?

3. The Golden Rule also seems like a fitting moral for this fable. Do you know the Golden Rule?

   "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you."

   Why would the Golden Rule be a good moral for this fable?

4. Have you ever been strong and helped someone who was weak? Have you ever been helped by someone who was stronger than you?

5. Recently in the news, a dog rescued his owner from drowning in the Colorado River. The owner fell out of her raft and found herself trapped underneath it in the swirling, rushing water. The dog dived under the raft and freed his owner from the ropes and, grabbing her hair in his mouth, pulled her to safety. What are the similarities of this news report to *The Lion and the Mouse*? What are the differences?

Go Deeper—

Always use complete sentences when filling in the blank spaces.

1. Circle the one sentence in the fable *The Lion and the Mouse* that captures its main idea.

2. Which proverb would best serve as a moral lesson of the fable? Circle the letter:

   a. "Rude parents make rude children."—Chinese proverb
   b. "Only real friends will tell you when your face is dirty."—Italian proverb
   c. "When a mighty tree falls, the goats eat its leaves."—African proverb
   d. "Even the strong sometimes need the friendship of the weak."

3. The word "**timid**" comes from the Latin word *timidus*, which means "fearful." Because the Mouse is described by the **adjective** "timid," what might be another word to describe her?

   a. brave b. troublesome
   c. excited d. shy

   Write a complete sentence that describes how a timid boy might act when he walks into his new classroom on the first day of school. The meaning of the word should be clear by the way you use it in your sentence.[2]

   _____

   _____

2. For this and any other exercise, if you run out of space, use a separate sheet of paper.

4. Circle the adjective that best describes the Lion. Why did you pick this word?

   fierce lazy wise sleepy honest

   _____

   _____

5. At the end of this fable, do you think the Lion changes or does he stay the same? Give a reason for your answer.

   changes stays the same

   _____

   _____

   _____

Writing Time

1. **COPYWORK**—In the space provided, neatly copy the following sentence:

   The Lion laughed so hard that the whole ground shook.

   _____

   _____

2. **DICTATION**—Your teacher will read to you about lions. Please listen carefully! After your teacher reads the statement once, she will read it slowly again and include the punctuation marks. Your task will be to write down the sentences as your teacher reads them one by one.

   _____

   _____

3. **SENTENCE PLAY**—"The Lion laughed so hard that the whole ground shook." Can you think what else might happen if you heard a Lion laughing? Maybe the Lion laughed so hard that monkeys fell from the trees. Maybe the Lion laughed so hard that it sounded like thunder. Think of two ways to finish the following sentences:

   - The Lion laughed so hard that _____

     _____.

- The Lion laughed so hard that _____

  _____.

4. **REWRITE** the fable using a Mouse in the role of the strong animal. What sort of weak animal would you need to make the story work? How would the trap be different?

   Examples: An Ant saves a Mouse from a snapping trap.
   A Spider saves a Mouse that has fallen into a jar of honey.

The Lion and the Mouse

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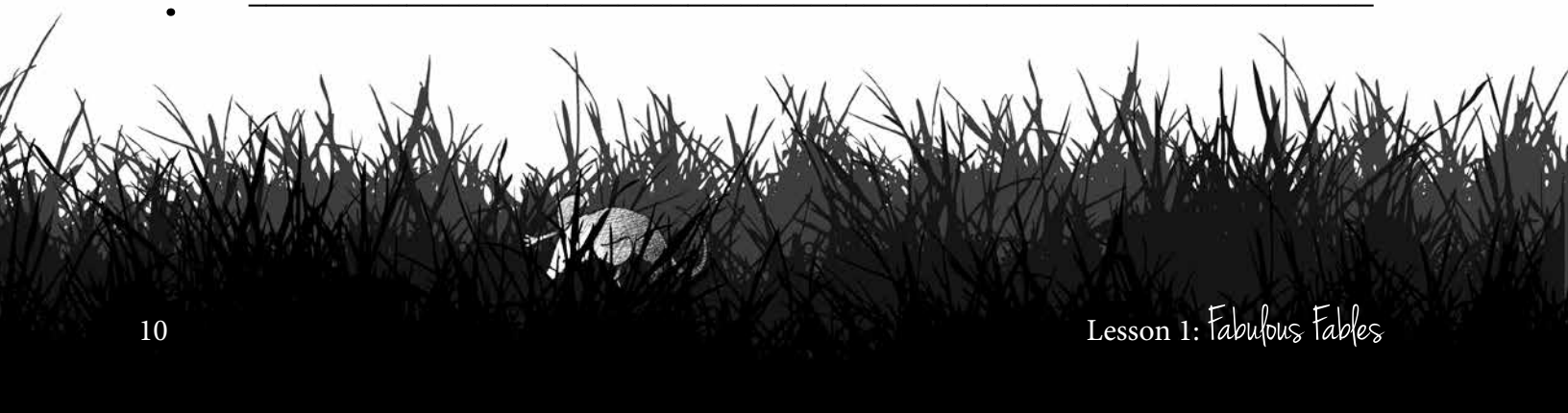
"You laughed when I said I would repay you," said the Mouse. "Now you see that even a Mouse can help a Lion."

The Mouse and the _____



_____

_____

_____

_____

- Why do you suppose changing a famous story can be a helpful way to learn how to tell your own stories?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Speak It

After you finish writing, read your fable to a classmate and listen to his fable. How are your fables different and how are they similar? Tell your classmate one thing you like about the way he changed the story.

Another way to practice speaking is to record yourself on a tablet computer or other recording device. Read the original fable back-to-back with your fable. Which fable is longer? Which fable has more action? Which fable best fits the moral?

Lesson 2

The Master Storyteller

"Once upon a time . . ."

Those are four magical words, aren't they? When we hear them, we know we're about to be carried off to a fabulous make-believe land.

The science-fiction movie series *Star Wars* begins just like a fairy tale: "A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away . . ." People love a good story, whether they lived hundreds of years ago or will live hundreds of years from now. Yes, people love a good story. Everyone. Everywhere.

Whether you live in Los Angeles or New York, Timbuktu or Kathmandu, or the town of Gnaw Bone, Indiana, as long as you are a human being you will love stories.

Why do we all love stories so well? Maybe it's because each of our lives is a story. Each of us has a beginning, a middle, and an end. We also play a part in a bigger story—the story of our family, the story of our school, the story of our country, the story of our religious faith. We long to understand our part in those bigger stories.

More than anything, we love stories because we want to see how people solve their problems. It's inspiring to see how Ludwig van Beethoven wrote beautiful music even though he was deaf, or how Ray Charles played jazz piano even though

he was blind, or how Bethany Hamilton returned to surfing even after a shark bit off her arm. We love to see how detectives solve mysteries or how weak athletes overcome stronger athletes to win a competition.

One of the important goals of this series of writing exercises is to help you become a better storyteller. By studying a master storyteller like Aesop, you can learn to write fables, too. "But why?" you might ask. "Why is it important for me to tell fables and stories well? Why must I work so hard at my writing?"

▶ Well, can you think of any good reasons?

_____

_____

_____

Since people love stories, it only makes sense that you will be listened to by others, and you will be heard better, if you can tell stories. Of course, you already tell stories—jokes and tattles and daily happenings—but I mean telling stories in a zesty, exciting way so that other people really, really enjoy listening to you.

▶ Pastors, priests, and rabbis tell stories in their sermons.
▶ Presidents tell stories in their speeches.
▶ Scientists tell stories in their science books.
▶ Teachers tell stories in their lessons.
▶ Camp counselors tell stories around the campfire.
▶ Parents tell stories at bedtime.

Have you ever wondered why so much storytelling is going on? It's because people want to share something important with you and they know you'll listen best when you hear a story. It only makes sense that if you want to be listened to, you will also learn to tell stories.

Every master storyteller is like a master chef. She has a spice chest filled with spices to help her flavor her story soup. In this chest, she has the zest of **vocabulary**—all

the wild, sparkly, crackling, popping words she can think of. The more vocabulary she pours into her story soup, the tastier her story will be.

A master storyteller can also change how words are ordered in a sentence. For example, she could write the sentence this way:

- Out of the window, Goldilocks jumped.

Or she could write it this way:

- Goldilocks jumped out of the window.

By changing the order of words, the storyteller keeps her audience hungry for more.

Two of the most important spices in the story chest are **amplification**, which is to make a story longer, and **summary**, which is to make a story shorter. A master storyteller must be able to draw out or shrink a story to suit the needs of her audience.

When there's plenty of time, a storyteller may amplify or stretch out the story to make it more exciting: "And then the Wolf, with his fangs bared and spit dripping from his lips, approached the house made of straw. Even the tiniest breath of a breeze caused that house to tremble and sway. The Wolf scratched the door—scritch, scritch, scritch—and in a gravelly, growly voice said, 'Let me in, Little Pig!' "

When there isn't much time or space, a storyteller may simply say: "And then the Wolf approached the house of straw. He said, 'Let me in, Little Pig!' "

Let's take a look at a fable told two ways, first as an amplification, and then as a summary.

Three Young Bulls and a Lion

A Lion was watching three young Bulls feeding in an open field. He tried to attack them several times, but they kept together and helped each other to drive him off. The Lion had little hope of eating them because he was no match for three strong Bulls with their sharp horns and hoofs. But he could not keep away from that field, for it is hard to resist watching a good meal, even when there is little chance of getting it.

Then one day the young Bulls quarreled over which one of them should eat a patch of sweet clover. They pawed the ground angrily, butted each other, and scratched each other with their horns. When the hungry Lion came to look at them and lick his chops, he found them in separate corners of the field, as far away from one another as they could get.

It was now an easy matter for the Lion to attack them one at a time. He ate all three young Bulls with the greatest satisfaction and **relish**.

MORAL: *In unity is strength.*

Now let's look at the same fable, written as a summary.

Three Young Bulls and a Lion

A Lion tried to attack three Bulls, but they kept together and helped each other to drive him off. The Lion waited and watched for a chance to eat the Bulls. One day the young Bulls quarreled. When the hungry Lion came to look at them, he found them far apart. It was now easy for the Lion to eat them one at a time.

▶ Does the fable still make sense in summary form? Is the summary useful in some way? Which version do you like best, the summary (short form) or amplification (long form)? Why?

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You will have an opportunity to amplify and summarize the fables and stories in this book. By changing the length of the fables, you will see more clearly how stories are put together. More than likely, you've already taken something apart: a flashlight, a Lego creation, etc. The process of taking something apart and putting it back together again helps you to understand how it works. Your ability to write stories will improve as you take apart stories and put them back together again.

Tell It Back—**Narration**

Without looking at the fable, tell the longer version of *Three Young Bulls and a Lion* as best as you remember it using your own words. For further practice, you can record your telling back into your favorite recording device and play it afterwards.

- Keep the events of the story in their proper order.
- Use a sprinkling of words from the fable, such as the word "relish."

Here's the first sentence to help you get started:

A Lion was watching three young Bulls feeding in an open field.

Talk About It—

1. "Unity is strength" is the motto of the nation of Bolivia. What does this saying mean? In Latin, another way to express this idea is *unus pro omnibus, omnes pro uno*, which means "One for all, all for one." Why were the young Bulls in this fable so foolish? How did ignoring *unus pro omnibus, omnes pro uno* lead to their destruction?

2. Think about the Lion watching the young Bulls from a distance. According to Aesop, "It is hard to resist watching a good meal, even when there is little chance of getting it." Can you think of an instance when you wanted something badly, but your parents did not let you have it? What was it that your parents wouldn't let you have? Why did your parents not want you to have the thing you craved? What lesson did you learn?

Go Deeper—

<u>Always use complete sentences when filling in the blank spaces.</u>

1. Which proverb from around the world would best serve as a moral lesson for the fable *Three Young Bulls and a Lion*? Circle the correct answer:
   a. "A mad bull should not be tied up with a thread."—Spain
   b. "Do not steal prey from a hungry lion."—Italy
   c. "United we stand, divided we fall."—United States (Kentucky)
   d. "Water can float a boat, but it can sink it, too."—China

2. Which verse from the Hebrew Scriptures would best serve as a moral lesson for the fable *Three Young Bulls and a Lion*? Circle the correct answer:
   a. "Though one may be overpowered,/ two can defend themselves./ A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."—Ecclesiastes 4:12
   b. "Lips that speak knowledge are a rare jewel."—Proverbs 20:15
   c. "If a man's bull injures the bull of another and it dies, they are to sell the live one and divide both the money and the dead animal equally." —Exodus 21:35
   d. "There is nothing new under the sun."—Ecclesiastes 1:9

3. Relish is not only the chopped pickles you put on your hot dogs. Since the hungry Lion eats the Bulls "with the greatest satisfaction and relish," the word "relish" probably means:
   a. disgust
   b. pleasure
   c. sadness
   d. wickedness

4. How is the personality of the Lion in the second fable (*Three Young Bulls and a Lion*) different than the Lion from the first fable (*The Lion and the Mouse*)? How are they similar? Explain your answer.

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Writing Time

1. **COPYWORK**—In the space provided, neatly copy the following sentence:

   The Lion had little hope of eating them because he was no match for three strong Bulls.

   _____

   _____

   _____

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2. **DICTATION**—Your teacher will read either a short poem or information about bulls. Please listen carefully! After your teacher reads once, he will read slowly again and include the punctuation marks. Your task will be to write down the sentences as your teacher reads them one by one.

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3. **SENTENCE PLAY**—"When the hungry Lion came to look at the Bulls, he licked his chops."

   To lick its chops, an animal licks the sides of its jaws with its very long tongue. Can you lick your chops?

   Think of two ways to show that the Lion is very hungry when he arrives at the field.

   - When the hungry Lion came to look at the Bulls,

     _____

     _____.

   - When the hungry Lion came to look at the Bulls,

     _____

     _____.

4. **SUMMARY**—When you summarize a story, you want to keep it short. Keep only the most important ideas. The rest of the writing can be done away with.

   a. Read *Three Young Bulls and a Lion* again. Decide which idea is the most important and circle or highlight it. Usually the main idea is a general statement—the big picture—and all the other sentences support it.
   b. Underline any words that are necessary to telling the story. Use these words to tell the story briefly in your summary.
   c. Cross out any words or sentences that are extra details. These details might make the fable more fun to read, but they aren't necessary for readers to understand the main idea.
   d. Rewrite the fable in four sentences or less.

Three Young Bulls and a Lion

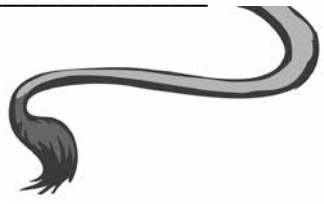
A Lion was watching three young Bulls feeding in an open field. He tried to attack them several times, but they kept together and helped each other to drive him off. The Lion had little hope of eating them because he was no match for three strong Bulls with their sharp horns and hoofs. But he could not keep away from that field, for it is hard to resist watching a good meal, even when there is little chance of getting it.

Then one day the young Bulls quarreled over which one of them should eat a patch of sweet clover. They pawed the ground angrily, butted each other, and scratched each other with their horns. When the hungry Lion came to look at them and lick his chops, he found them in separate corners of the field, as far away from one another as they could get.

It was now an easy matter for the Lion to attack them one at a time. He ate all three young Bulls with the greatest satisfaction and relish.

MORAL: *In unity is strength.*

SUMMARY:



5. **AMPLIFICATION**—Below is the summary of an Indian fable called *The Hunter and the Doves*, which also teaches "unity is strength." Make the summary of this story longer.

   a. You can add description and details. What do the Doves look like? How does the King Dove look different from the others? What does the Hunter look like? Where are the Doves coming from and where are they going? What types of seeds are scattered on the ground and what do they taste like to the birds? Does the King Dove or the Hunter have a name?

   b. You can expand the moral lesson by telling why "unity is strength" and why it is important to be unified.

The Hunter and the Doves

An Indian Fable

A flock of Doves spotted some seeds scattered on the ground. When they flew down to eat the seeds, a Hunter hiding in the tree above dropped a net upon them. The birds were trapped! Keeping his head, the King Dove told the other Doves to each lift up a string of the net and flap her wings. By doing so, the Doves were able to lift the net together and carry it off as they escaped through the air.

MORAL: *In unity is strength.*

SUMMARY:

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_____

_____

Speak It—

Read your amplification of *The Hunter and the Doves* to your class or your teacher. Listen to other amplifications. Pick an amplification you like and explain why. (Note to solo students: you may record your amplification on a tablet computer or other recording device and listen to it afterwards.)

What are some of the things you did to make the story longer?

Lesson 3

Anthropomorphism—
Rabbits in Jackets, Brainy Crows

Do you know the story of Peter Rabbit? Poor Peter, a young rabbit, loses his jacket and shoes in Mr. McGregor's garden, and Peter Rabbit is almost caught and baked in a meat pie. Peter escapes to his home, where he is sent to bed while his sisters enjoy blackberries and milk. Now, there's something strange about this story. First of all, rabbits don't wear jackets and shoes. They don't sleep in beds either. *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* is an example of a story with anthropomorphism. Peter acts like a naughty human boy.

Anthropomorphism (an-thro-po-mor-phism) is a long word that means something really very simple. *Anthropos* in Greek means "man" while morph means "to change form." So put them together and the word roughly means "a human changing form." Whenever a storybook animal acts like a human being, that's anthropomorphism. Whenever an animal talks, or wears clothes, or smokes a pipe, or eats with a fork, that's anthropomorphism.

We see anthropomorphism in famous characters such as the March Hare from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, who wears a pocket watch and goes to crazy tea parties. The flying monkeys from *The Wizard of Oz* wear caps and vests, and they follow a wicked king of the monkeys. By contrast, Aslan the lion from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is a wise king of the beasts who sits on a throne and battles against evil. Other famous anthropomorphisms are Winnie the Pooh, Puss in Boots, The Three Bears, and the Wolf in *Little Red Riding Hood*.

▶ Why do you suppose so many writers use anthropomorphism in their stories? Is there any advantage to using an animal character instead of a human?

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The following is a fable about a Crow with a very serious problem. How does Aesop use anthropomorphism to make the story more interesting?

The Crow and the Pitcher

The weather was burning hot, and the birds could find nothing to drink. Even the creek beds carried only sand. A thirsty Crow found a pitcher with a little water in the bottom. But the pitcher was tall and had a narrow neck, and no matter how hard she tried, the Crow could not reach the water. "Oh, I will surely die of thirst!" the poor bird groaned. In despair, she came up with an idea. She gathered a pile of small pebbles and then, one by one, she dropped them into the pitcher. As each pebble plunked to the bottom, the water rose a little higher. Soon the water was high enough for the Crow to dip her beak into it. How sweet and cool it tasted! By using her wits, the Crow had saved her life.

Tell It Back—**Narration**

Without looking at the fable, tell back *The Crow and the Pitcher* as best as you remember it using your own words. For further practice, you can record your telling back into a device and listen to it afterwards.

- Keep the events of the story in their proper order.
- Use a sprinkling of words from the fable, such as the word "thirst."

Here's the first sentence to get you started:

The weather was burning hot, and the birds could find nothing to drink.

Talk About It—

1. Remember that anthropomorphism is an animal acting like a person. What does the Crow do that seems human? Why is anthropomorphism important to this fable, *The Crow and the Pitcher*? How would the story be different if the main character possessed human hands?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. Writers anthropomorphize animals to stand for certain types of people. For instance, a cat can stand for a lazy person. A pig can stand for a sloppy person. What type of animal would best stand for these types of people?

   a. Thief _____

   b. Violent bully _____

   c. Liar _____

   d. Coward _____

   e. Wise man or woman _____

   f. Weight lifter _____

   g. Trickster _____

3. Look carefully at the illustration of Jemima Puddle-Duck by Beatrix Potter and a painting of a duck by Hiroshige. In which of these pictures is the bird anthropomorphized? Explain your answer.

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_____

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_____

_____

Go Deeper—

1. Circle the one sentence in *The Crow and the Pitcher* that captures the main idea of the fable.

2. Which sentence would best serve as a moral lesson of the fable? Circle the correct answer:

   a. "Better to go hungry than thirsty."
   b. "If you're in trouble, use your brain."
   c. "Crows are smart birds."
   d. "When you need help, use pebbles."

3. What season is described in this story? Give a reason for your answer.

   _____

   _____

4. Write down three phrases from the fable that provide clues that the weather is dangerously dry?

   a. _____

   b. _____

   c. _____

5. Circle the adjective that best describes the Crow. Why did you pick this word?

   silly rude clever brave stubborn

   _____

   _____

   _____

Writing Time—

1. **COPYWORK**—In the space provided, neatly copy the following sentence:

   As each pebble plunked to the bottom, the water rose a little higher.

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. **DICTATION**—Your teacher will read to you about crows. Please listen carefully! After your teacher reads once, he will read slowly again and include the punctuation marks. Your task will be to write down the sentences as your teacher reads them one by one.

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

3. **SENTENCE PLAY**—"Even the creek beds carried only sand." Using this sentence as a model, write another sentence to show the seriousness of the dry spell.

You could start your sentence with:

Even the fountains . . .

Even the ponds . . .

Even the birdbaths . . .

_____

_____

4. **COPIOUSNESS**—Welcome to your first exercise in writing copiously. This means that you are going to work on finding different ways to say the same thing. The word "copious" comes from the Latin word *copious*, meaning "plentiful or abundant." If you were to say, "My neighbor talks copiously," you probably mean that your neighbor uses lots of words and is a bit of a blabbermouth. If you were to say, "I found copious amounts of candy in the jar," you mean that you've hit the jackpot—lots and lots of candy.

   Whether you know it or not, you speak copiously all the time. Take the typical kid who has ice cream on the brain. She may say, "Wow, it's hot. What about ice cream?" "I'm boiling. Ice cream sure sounds amazing." "I feel like I'm stuck in a furnace. I need ice cream." "I'm a puddle of sweat. I'll perish without ice cream." And so on. **Copiousness** comes naturally, especially when you want something really, really badly.

   For starters, we're going to work on changing our **nouns** and adjectives.

   A noun is a person, place, thing, or idea. An adjective adds description to a noun and helps us to "see" it more clearly. For example, when you sell cold lemonade, "lemonade" is a noun because it is a thing. The word "cold" is an adjective because it describes the lemonade. Another example: When you visit your sweet old grandmother, "grandmother" is a noun because it is a person. What are the adjectives that describe grandmother? There are two.

   _____ _____

Mark the nouns and adjective in the sentence below. Place an *N* over the nouns and an *ADJ* over the adjective.

She gathered a pile of small pebbles.

Hint: There are three nouns, but only one of them is described by an adjective.

Replace the adjective "small" in this sentence with different adjectives that have close to the same meaning. See if you can come up with three.

a. She gathered a pile of _____ pebbles.

b. She gathered a pile of _____ pebbles.

c. She gathered a pile of _____ pebbles.

5. **AMPLIFICATION**—The fable *The Crow and the Pitcher* is shortened below. Read it over and think of ways you can make it longer.

   a. You can add description, names, and details. What does the Crow look like? What signs does she see that the weather is very hot? How does she feel besides thirsty? Does she feel dizzy, sweaty, or weak?
   b. You can expand the moral lesson by telling why using your brain is important.

The Crow and the Pitcher

A Crow was dying of thirst during a terrible drought. She found a pitcher with water at the bottom, but the neck was too narrow for her to reach it. Dropping pebbles into the pitcher, the Crow raised the level of water and saved her life.

6. **SUMMARY**—When you summarize a story, you want to keep only the most important ideas. The rest of the writing can be done away with.

a. Read the fable *The Hare and the Partridge* below. Decide which idea is the most important and circle or highlight it. This is the main idea you want to keep and support.

b. Underline any words that are essential to telling the story. Use these words to tell the story briefly in your summary.

c. Cross out any words or sentences that are extra details. These details might make the fable more fun to read, but they aren't necessary for readers to understand the main idea.

d. Rewrite the following fable in four sentences or less.

The Hare and the Partridge

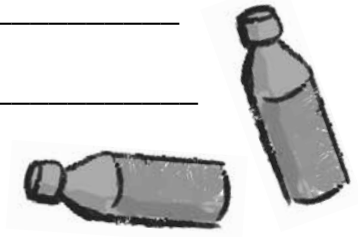
by Jean de La Fontaine

A Hare and a Partridge lived side by side in a big field. They were good neighbors and got along well enough. One day, a pack of Hunting Dogs came tearing across their field, barking and snapping and attacking everything that moved. The Hare was forced to run for cover through the trees. She found a place to hide under a pile of sticks and crouched there, shivering and quaking. Sadly, her overheated body gave off a smell that drew the Dogs' noses. In a jiffy, the Dogs found the poor Hare and scattered her pile of sticks. Then they finished her off.

Later, after the Dogs had left, the Partridge stepped out of hiding. She stuck her beak in the air and scoffed to the dead Hare, "You always said you were so swift. So now what has become of your feet? I'd much rather be a Partridge than a Hare any day."

At that moment, out of the clear, blue sky, a Hawk struck the Partridge with her sharp talons and carried her off to her nest.

MORAL: *Never laugh at another person's misfortunes.*



Speak It—

Read your summary of *The Hare and the Partridge* to your class or teacher. Or record your summary on a recording device, and listen to it afterwards.

What are some other ways you could have shortened the fable?