

Study Guide prepared by
Catherine Bush
Barter Playwright-in-Residence

Aesop's Fables

Book & Lyrics by Catherine Bush Music by Ben Mackel
*Especially for Grades K-8

By the Barter Players – Barter on Demand

(NOTE: standards listed below are for reading *Aesop's Fables*, seeing a performance of the show *On Demand*, and completing the study guide.)

Virginia SOLs

English – K.1, K.8, 1.1, 1.8, 1.9, 2.1, 2.7, 2.8, 2.12, 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.9, 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 4.7, 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 5.7, 5.9, 6.2, 6.4, 6.5, 6.9, 7.1, 7.4, 7.5, 7.9, 8.2, 8.4, 8.5, 8.9

Theatre Arts – 6.5, 6.7, 6.8, 6.14, 6.17, 6.18, 6.20, 6.21, 7.6, 7.9, 7.18, 7.20, 8.10, 8.18, 8.22

Music – K.11, K.13, 1.9, 1.11, 2.8, 2.9, 3.9, 3.10, 4.6, 4.8, 4.9, 5.6, 5.8, 5.9, 5.10, 6.9, 7.7, 8.7

Tennessee/North Carolina Common Core State Standards

English/Language Arts - Reading Literacy: K.2, K.4, K.5, K.9, 1.1, 1.2, 1.9, 1.10, 2.2, 2.3, 2.10, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.9, 3.10, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.7, 4.10, 5.1, 5.4, 5.10, 6.1, 6.3, 6.4, 6.7, 6.10, 7.1, 7.3, 7.4, 7.7, 7.10, 8.1, 8.3, 8.4, 8.7, 8.10

English Language Arts – Writing: K.5, K.7, K.8, 1.3, 1.5, 1.8, 2.1, 2.3, 2.5, 2.8, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.7, 3.8, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, 6.1, 6.7, 6.9, 7.1, 7.3, 7.7, 7.9, 8.1, 8.3, 8.7, 8.9

Tennessee Fine Arts Curriculum Standards

Theatre – K.1, K.3, K.4, K.5, K.6, 1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 4.1, 4.3, 4.6, 4.7, 5.1, 5.3, 5.6, 5.7, 6-8.1, 6-8.6, 6-8.7

Music – K.7, K.8, 1.7, 1.8, 2.7, 2.8, 3.7, 3.8, 4.7, 4.8, 5.7, 5.8, 6-8.7, 6-8.8

North Carolina Essential Standards

Theatre Arts – K.A.1, K.AE.1, 1.A.1, 1.AE.1, 1.CU.2, 2.C.2, 2.A.1, 2.AE.1, 3.C.1, 3.C.2, 3.A.1, 3.CU.1, 3.CU.2, 4.C.1, 4.A.1, 4.AE.1, 5.C.1, 5.A.1, 5.AE.1, 5.CU.2, 6.A.1, 6.AE.1, 6.CU.2, 7.A.1, 7.AE.1, 8.A.1, 8.AE.1, 8.CU.2

Music – K.CR.1, 1.CR.1, 2.CR.1, 3.CR.1, 4.CR.1, 5.MR.1, 5.CR.1, 6.CR.1, 7.CR.1, 8.CR.1

Setting

Various locations in ancient Greece, including the House of Xanthus, a wealthy landowner, the fields and forest surrounding his home and the arena in which the local games are held. The year is 580 B.C.



Characters

Aesop – a Greek slave and master storyteller

Xanthus – his master, bitter and angry

Calliope – wife to Xanthus

Guard servant to Xanthus

Lion – a beast with a thorn in his paw

Oak – a mighty oak tree, proud

Reed – a tender reed, flexible

Wind – the wind

Fox – a sly fox with a gorgeous tail

Huntsman – a hunter in the woods

Beast – a ferocious, savage beast

Daughter – the Huntsman’s daughter

Shepherd – a boy who cries “wolf”

Wolf – a wolf

Hare – a very fast rabbit

Tortoise – a very slow tortoise

Sheep – the wolf in sheep’s clothing



Note: Cast Size and Doubling of Actors

In this production of *Aesop’s Fables* we will be using only six actors, with some actors playing more than one role. Characters will be distinguished by costume, voice and other physical character traits.

Synopsis

Aesop, a Greek slave, has escaped from his cruel master Xanthus. In the forest he discovers a wounded Lion with a thorn his paw. When Aesop removes the thorn, the Lion pledges his gratitude but is unable to prevent Aesop’s capture and subsequent return to the house of his master. Xanthus, heartbroken and bitter over the recent death of his wife Calliope, is determined to put Aesop to death for escaping. Aesop’s only hope for salvation is to regale Xanthus with stories whose lessons not only help Xanthus cope with his suffering but help him remember happier times with Calliope as well. So it is that we hear various fables including **The Oak and the Reed** (*it is better to bend than to break*), **The Fox Without a Tail** (*misery loves company*), **The Beast in Love** (*love tames the wild beast*), **The Hare and the Tortoise** (*slow and steady wins the race*) and **The Boy Who Cried Wolf** (*no one believes a liar*). But even these stories aren’t enough to persuade Xanthus to change his mind and he orders Aesop to be thrown to the lions. But the Lion charging Aesop is the same one Aesop met in the forest and instead of devouring Aesop, he licks his hand in gratitude. Xanthus is dumbfounded; Aesop explains how he helped the Lion and Xanthus finally recognizes that Aesop has been trying to help him as well. In gratitude he frees Aesop, who stays on to become storyteller to Xanthus, guaranteeing that the memory of Calliope will live on.

Biography of Aesop

Aesop was an Ancient Greek storyteller who lived in the 6th century BC in Athens, Greece. He is famous for several myths, commonly referred to as *Aesop's Fables*. Little is known about the life of Aesop. According to historical facts he was a slave; some legends suggest he was a hunchback slave but his real appearance is a mystery. Aesop was also reputed to be smart, resourceful and inventive, qualities that allowed him to eventually acquire his freedom. His stories were passed down orally and weren't written down until centuries later. Through the use of (mostly) animal protagonists, Aesop's fables consist of simple tales with moral endings transcending time and place so to be as relevant today as they were millennia ago.



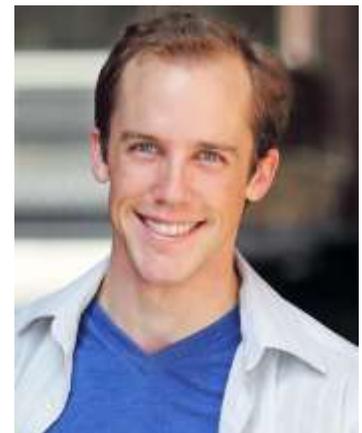
Biography of Catherine Bush – Book & Lyrics



Catherine Bush lives in Abingdon, Virginia where she is Barter Theatre's Playwright-in-Residence. Her plays for young audiences include *Cry Wolf!*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Rapunzel*, *Frosty*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *All I Want for Christmas is My Two Front Teeth*, *My Imaginary Pirate*, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, *The Call of the Wild*, *The Princess and the Pea*, *Rudolph*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, *Aesop's Fables*, *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*, *Mother Goose: The Musical*, *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, *Old Turtle and the Broken Truth*, *Jingle All the Way*, *Antigone*, *Robin Hood*, and *Great Expectations*. www.catherinebushplays.com

Biography of Ben Mackel – Music

Ben Mackel was a resident actor at Barter Theatre for 8 years. During that time he composed music for several shows including *Billy Goat Gruff the Musical*, *The Elves and The Shoe Maker*, *The Brementown Musicians*, *Winter Wheat*, and *Of Mice and Men*, which toured nationally. Aside from acting at other regional theatres, Ben tours and records with the harmony driven string band, **The Blue Eyed Bettys**. As the band, they recently co-composed and acted in *The Tourist Trap*, a folksy musical with puppets at Peppercorn Children's Theatre. For more information and tour dates, go to theblueeyedbettys.com





A Brief History

Barter Theatre was founded during the Great Depression by Robert Porterfield, an enterprising young actor. He and his fellow actors found themselves out of work and hungry in New York City. Porterfield contrasted that to the abundance of food, but lack of live theatre, around his home region in Southwest Virginia. He returned to Washington County with an extraordinary proposition: bartering produce from the farms and gardens of the area to gain admission to see a play.

Barter Theatre opened its doors on June 10, 1933 proclaiming, “With vegetables you cannot sell, you can buy a good laugh.” The price of admission was 40 cents or the equivalent in produce, the concept of trading “ham for Hamlet” caught on quickly. At the end of the first season, the Barter Company cleared \$4.35 in cash, two barrels of jelly and enjoyed a collective weight gain of over 300 pounds.

Playwrights including Noel Coward, Tennessee Williams and Thornton Wilder accepted Virginia ham as payment for royalties. An exception was George Bernard Shaw, a vegetarian, who bartered the rights to his plays for spinach.

Today, Barter Theatre has a reputation as a theatre where many actors performed before going on to achieve fame and fortune. The most recognized of these alumni include Gregory Peck, Patricia Neal, Ernest Borgnine, Hume Cronyn, Ned Beatty, Gary Collins, Larry Linville and Frances Fisher. The list also included James Burrows, creator of *Cheers*, Barry Corbin, and the late Jim Varney.

Robert Porterfield passed away in 1971. His successor, Rex Partington, had been at Barter in the 1950s as an actor and in the 1970s as stage manager. Rex returned as chief administrator from 1972 until his retirement in 1992. In March 2006, he passed away.

Richard Rose was named the Producing Artistic Director in October 1992. During his tenure, attendance grew from 42,000 to more than 163,000 annual patrons. Significant capital improvements were also made, including renovation of the main stage (now Gilliam Stage) in 1995 and the 2006 addition of The Barter Café at Stage II (now the Smith Theatre). Rose retired in December of 2019 and Katy Brown, who had been at Barter since 1998 as the Director of the Barter Players and as an Associate Artistic Director, was named the fourth Producing Artistic Director – and is the first woman to hold the position.

Barter represents two distinct venues of live theatre: Barter Theatre’s Gilliam Stage, and Barter’s Smith Theatre. Gilliam Stage, with over 500 seats, features traditional theatre in a luxurious setting. Barter’s Smith Theatre offers seating for 167 around a thrust stage in an intimate setting and is perfect for more adventurous productions. Barter Theatre is also home to The Barter Players, a talented ensemble of actors who produce plays for young audiences throughout the year.

History is always in the making at Barter Theatre, building on legends of the past; Barter looks forward to the challenge of growth in the future.

Did you know...?

The difference between a **fable** and a **parable**:



fable: succinct fictional story, in prose or verse, that features animals, mythical creatures, plants, inanimate objects or forces of nature which are anthropomorphized (given human qualities), and that illustrates a moral lesson (a “moral”), which may at the end be expressed explicitly in a pithy maxim.

The Ant and the Grasshopper

parable: succinct story, in prose or verse, which illustrates one or more instructive principles, or lessons, or (sometimes) a normative principle. It differs from a fable in that fables use animals, plants, inanimate objects, and forces of nature as characters, while parables generally feature human characters. It is a type of analogy.



The Prodigal Son

Fabulous Fables You'll See in the Show!

Androcles and the Lion

A slave named Androcles once escaped from his master and fled to the forest. As he was wandering about there he came upon a Lion lying down moaning and groaning. At first he turned to flee, but finding that the Lion did not pursue him, he turned back and went



up to him. As he came near, the Lion put out his paw, which was all swollen and bleeding, and Androcles found that a huge thorn had got into it, and was causing all the pain. He pulled out the thorn and bound up the paw of the Lion, who was soon able to rise and lick the hand of Androcles like a dog. Then the Lion took Androcles to his cave, and every day used to bring him meat from which to live. But shortly afterwards both Androcles and the Lion were captured, and the slave was sentenced to be thrown to the Lion, after the latter had been kept without food for several days. The Emperor and all his Court came to see the spectacle, and Androcles was led out into the middle of the arena. Soon the Lion was

let loose from his den and rushed bounding and roaring towards his victim. But as soon as he came near to Androcles he recognized his friend, and fawned upon him, and licked his hands like a friendly dog. The Emperor, surprised at this, summoned Androcles to him, who told him the whole story. Whereupon the slave was pardoned and freed, and the Lion let loose to his native forest.

Gratitude is the sign of noble souls.

The Oak and the Reed

A very large Oak was uprooted by the wind and thrown across a stream. It fell among some Reeds, which it thus addressed: "I wonder how you, who are so light and weak, are not entirely crushed by these strong winds." They replied, "You fight and contend with the wind, and consequently you are destroyed; while we on the contrary bend before the least breath of air, and therefore remain unbroken, and escape.



It is better to bend than to break

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.”

Misery loves company

The Beast in Love

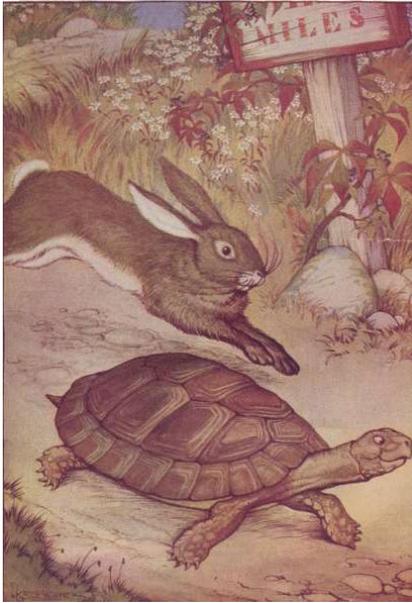
Note: in the original story, the Beast is actually a Lion. The name was changed in this play in order not to confuse the audience with Androcles’ Lion.

A Beast once fell in love with a beautiful maiden and proposed marriage to her parents. The old people did not know what to say. They did not like to give their daughter to the Beast, yet they did not wish to enrage the savage. At last the father said “We feel highly honored by your proposal, sir, but you see our daughter is a tender young thing, and we fear that in the vehemence of your affection you might possibly do her some injury. Might I suggest that you have your claws removed, and your teeth extracted – then we would gladly consider your proposal again.” The Beast was so much in love that he had his claws removed and his big teeth taken out. But when he came again to the parents of the young girl they simply laughed in his face, and bade him do his worst.

Love can tame the wild beast



The Hare and the Tortoise



The Hare was once boasting of his speed before the other animals. “I have never yet been beaten,” said he, “when I put forth my full speed. I challenge any one here to race with me.”

The Tortoise said quietly, “I accept your challenge.”

“That is a good joke,” said the Hare; “I could dance round you all the way.”

“Keep your boasting till you’ve beaten me,” answered the Tortoise. “Shall we race?”

So a course was fixed and a start was made. The Hare darted almost out of sight at once, but soon stopped and, to show his contempt for the Tortoise, lay down to have a nap. The Tortoise plodded on and plodded on, and when the Hare awoke from his nap, he saw the Tortoise just near the winning-post and could not run up in time

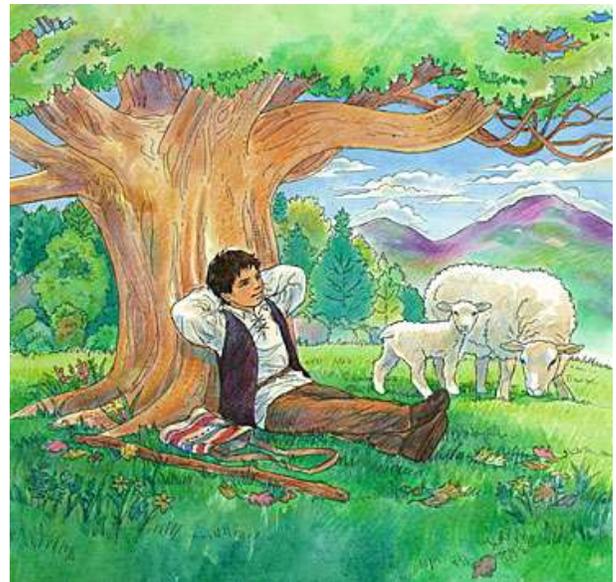
to save the race. Then said the Tortoise...

Slow and steady wins the race

The Boy Who Cried Wolf

A Shepherd Boy, who watched a flock of sheep near a village, brought out the villagers three or four times by crying out, “Wolf! Wolf!” and when his neighbors came to help him, laughed at them for their pains. The Wolf, however, did truly come at last. The Shepherd-boy, now really alarmed, shouted in an agony of terror, “Pray, do come and help me; the Wolf is killing the sheep,” but no one paid any heed to his cries, nor rendered any assistance. The Wolf, having no cause of fear, at his leisure destroyed the whole flock.

No one believes a liar



WORD SEARCH

Find the following words below: Aesop, fables, tortoise, hare, lion, shepherd, slow and steady, Xanthus, Calliope, boy who cried wolf, oak, reed, wind, fox without a tail, gratitude, nobility, beast, teeth, claws, race, challenge, love, freedom, thorn

B O Y W H O C R I E D W O L F
E X L C L A W S D N F Q S X O
S D N I Y W T R D R I L T A X
I Y O O C R E H E N O F S N W
O N O S B H T E O W I R A T I
T E J X P I D P A R E W E H T
R Q G E V O L N O V N Q B U H
O D H N M M D I O S M J G S O
T S A L E S D L T D E E R H U
H D R Y T L O A K Y G A T E T
E D E E P U L N O E U E L C A
F C A R Y F U A U N E C L A T
W D S E L B A F H T D C G R A
Y C A L L I O P E C E G U K I
E D U T I T A R G R J T Q M L

True and False

Write **T** if the statement is **True** and **F** if the statement is **False**.

1. ____ Aesop was a slave in the American South.
2. ____ A “fable” is the same thing as a “parable.”
3. ____ The Tortoise won the race because he was the fastest.
4. ____ The Reed was much more flexible than the Oak.
5. ____ The Fox was happy to lose his tail.
6. ____ The Lion had a thorn in his paw.
7. ____ The Hare took a nap during the race with the Tortoise.
8. ____ The moral of the Oak and the Reed is “misery loves company.”
9. ____ The Beast (Lion) had his teeth removed because of cavities.
10. ____ The Shepherd Boy initially cried “Wolf” as a joke.
11. ____ The Lion killed Androcles in the arena.
12. ____ The moral of The Hare and the Tortoise is “slow and steady wins the race.”
13. ____ The other foxes chose to keep their tails.
14. ____ “The Prodigal Son” is an example of a fable.

Matching

Match the person or place in the first column with the corresponding description in the second.

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. The Reed | a. extremely boastful of his tail |
| 2. Lion | b. a liar |
| 3. Tortoise | c. Greek slave |
| 4. Fox | d. very flexible |
| 5. Hare | e. predator of sheep |
| 6. Wolf | f. injured paw |
| 7. The Oak | g. proud and unbending |
| 8. Aesop | h. fastest creature in the forest |
| 9. Shepherd Boy | i. won the race |

Color the picture below.



Questions/Activities

1. What function does a fox's tail serve? What do you think happened to the Fox after he lost his tail in the trap? **Discuss.**
2. Using the Internet and the library as resources, **research how is the fox related to the wolf. Present your findings to the class.**
3. Characters in a play or a book always have a reason for doing what they do. This is called their "motivation." What motivates Androcles to help the Lion? The Tortoise to race the Hare? The Shepherd Boy to cry wolf the first time? **Discuss.**
4. What is the difference between a tortoise and a turtle? Between a rabbit and a hare? Make a chart comparing these animals and **present your findings to the class.**



5. Which of these animals is actually the fastest: the lion, the wolf, the hare or the fox? Rank them in order from fastest to slowest.
6. Why do you think Aesop used animals in his stories? Why do you think his fables have remained popular to this day? **Discuss.**
7. Animals such as lions, wolves, foxes and turtles are the inspiration for many songs, television shows and movies. Pick one of these animals – for example, the lion – and put together a collage of all the famous lions in pop culture. **Present it to your class.**



8. This play was adapted from various fables attributed to Aesop. **Compare and contrast the play to the fables.** In what ways are the play and the fables similar? How are they different? *Why* are they different? **Discuss.**

9. How many characters are in this play? How many actors? What do the actors change, besides their costumes, to become new characters?

10. Locations onstage are called “settings.” What are the various settings of this play?

11. What was your favorite part in the play *Aesop’s fables*? **Write a paragraph retelling that part in your own words.**

12. **Write a letter to the actors from this production.** Tell them what you liked about the play, their performance, etc. Mail your letters to:

The Barter Players
c/o Barter Theatre
P.O. Box 867
Abingdon, VA 24212-0867
ATTN: Aesop’s Fables

13. Pick another fable from Aesop’s collection and **write your own script** for it. Keep in mind that, in theatre, the story should be told in dialogue (conversation between two or more characters) and action (what the characters do). Make sure that each one of your characters in the scene has a reason (a *motivation*) for being in the scene.



14. After you’ve finished your script, **design the set that suits the needs for your scene.** Keep in mind time, place and location. Is it on a hillside? In a cave? Is it day or night? Summer or winter? Also consider the entrances and exits of your characters. How do they enter the scene? How do they exit?

Draw a picture of what your set should look like. Then make a model of it and present it to your class, explaining how it will work when built.

15. “Props” (short for *properties*) are the objects a character uses in a scene. For example, if the Shepherd Boy carried a staff, the staff would be considered a prop. Determine the props your characters will need in the scene you’ve scripted and **create a prop list.** Hint: Keep it simple. Unless a prop is absolutely necessary, don’t use it.

16. Now that you have your script, set, and props, design the costumes you'll need for your scene. Again, keep in mind time and place. Draw a picture of the costumes you would need to turn an actor into a grasshopper or an ant or a crow, etc. Make it elaborate or as simple as you desire, but keep in mind the need for a character to speak and move comfortably and your ability to make the costume. Once you have your drawing (renderings) completed, make your costumes.



17. Working with other students, rehearse the scene you have scripted and using your costumes and props (and set, if possible), **present the scene to your class.** What did you learn about theatre from this process? Was there any aspect of the production process that you liked better than others? Why? **Discuss.**

18. The play you saw is a musical, which means that some of the story is told in song. How does the music forward the action of the story? How might a composer have a role in musical theatre? Pick another one of Aesop's fables and using a well-known tune, **write lyrics that tell the story.**

Vocabulary

slave

brute

punish

thorn

brawn

majestic

shroud

frivolous

zephyr

scurry

tempest

asunder

uprooted

pride

refined

lavish

sumptuous

bombastic

appearance

appendage

inevitable

humiliation

ponder

cloying

recognize

misery

ferocious

investigate

inedible

elude

demonstrate

philosophy

vanity

arrogance

dispute

claim

challenge

persistence

pace

sorcerer

gratitude

nobility

Define each of the vocabulary words listed above then write sentences using them. Remember: anyone reading your sentence should be able to understand the word from the context in which it is used.

Define *comedy* and *tragedy*.

Is *Aesop's Fables* a comedy or a tragedy? **Cite three samples from the book to support your position.** How much does a character's point-of-view determine whether an event is comic or tragic? **Discuss.**



Suggested Further Reading:

Androcles and the Lion by Dennis Nolan

The Really Groovy Story of the Tortoise and the Hare by Kristyn Crow and Christina Forshay