Learn About Fables by Cynthia von Buhler

Since ancient times, children and adult alike have enjoyed telling fables. The best known and most loved fables were written by Aesop, who is thought to have been born around 620 BC in Greece. He began life as a slave, but was eventually freed because of his great wit and wisdom.

A fable is a short story that illustrates a moral or lesson. Fables reveal meaningful observations about human life in a simple, straightforward fashion. Instead of human characters, they feature animals, plants, inanimate objects, or forces of nature (like wind or stars), which are given human-like qualities. These characters appeal to children, and the stories are often funny and entertaining. Common sayings like “look before you leap,” and “birds of a feather flock together” are actually drawn from Aesop’s fables.

Using this lesson plan, children will learn about fables and write a moral of their own for the book, But Who Will Bell The Cats? If there is time, they can also illustrate the moral they have written. This can be done with one child at home, or with a full classroom at school.

Instructional Plan:

Discuss the elements that make a story a fable.

1. A fable is usually simple, short, and written in prose or verse.
2. A fable features animals, plants, inanimate objects, or forces of nature which are anthropomorphized (given human qualities).
3. A fable illustrates a “moral” with a meaningful observation, written in one line at the end of the story.

Read Aesop’s story The Mice In Council to the child(ren). You can find the story on the first page of But Who Will Bell The Cats?

Discuss the following:

1. “Belling the cat” or “to bell the cat” is an English colloquialism which means to suggest or attempt to perform a difficult or impossible task. One mouse declares that the only way to avoid the dangerous cat is to tie a bell around its neck in order to have a warning whenever it is near. An older, wiser mouse then asks, “but who will bell the cat? Of course, none of the mice want to endanger themselves in order to place a bell around the cat’s neck. The moral of the story is that it is easy to suggest difficult (or impossible) solutions if the individual giving the solution is not the one who has to implement it.

Read a couple of other short fables to your child (or class), then discuss the morals given at the end of each one. You can also discuss the morals given below:
Birds of a feather flock together.
Those who seek to please everybody please nobody.
Fair-weather friends are not worth very much.
There is no believing a liar, even when he speaks the truth.
Fine feathers don’t make fine birds.
The early bird catches the worm.
Don’t count your chickens before they hatch.
You can’t judge a book by its cover.
Look before you leap.

Read *But Who Will Bell The Cats?* to the child(ren).

1. Ask the child(ren) to think about what the book taught them and have them write a one-line moral for the story. Give them some time to think about it, and allow them to go back and re-read the story if they are having trouble.

2. Collect and read the morals out loud. Discuss, compare, and contrast the answers. Offer up the following as example answers to the question:

You get more with kindness than with force.
If there is a will, there is a way.
If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.
No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.
Persuasion is better than force.

If there is time the child(ren) can either illustrate the moral they have written or one you have read to them. Have them use paper, crayons, paint, clay, a digital camera, or anything else that works. Remind the child(ren) that fables always feature animals, plants, inanimate objects, or forces of nature (like wind or stars) which are anthropomorphized (given human qualities)

**Supplies:**

1. *But Who Will Bell The Cats?* by Cynthia von Buhler
2. Any book with a selection of Aesop’s Fables
3. A printout of the list of morals below
4. Optional: paper, crayons, paint, clay, or a digital camera

**Length of Lesson: One hour**

**Instructional Objectives:**

Students will learn:

What a “fable” is.
What a “moral” is.
How to read and think about what the story is teaching them.
How to write a short, meaningful sentence.
How to illustrate an idea.