

Fable Assignment Sheet

For the first of our progymnasmata, you will write a fable. Fables began with oral culture but were adapted by early Greek rhetoricians as an effective way to teach a moral truth or convey a particular code of behavior (which was also their purpose in oral culture). They were defined as "false discourse which gives an image of the truth" in Greece.

Unlike the later pre-exercises we will be considering, the fable does not have a division as such. However, the early instruction manuals for the *progymnasmata* mention two elements: the story itself and the statement of the message. If the message is first, it is called a *prefabular*; it is a *postfabular* if related after the story. The ancients also differentiate between *ethical* fables (which rely solely on animal and magical creatures) and *mixed* fables which tell stories of human interaction with talking animals or other magical beings.

Procedure

1. Think of a moral message you would like to convey to your audience. This can be something classic such as "ideal hands are the devils playthings" or more contemporary such as "pics or it didn't happen."
2. Based on your message, imagine the kind of animal or magical creature that might best exemplify why your message is important. For instance, foxes are noted for being sly, so for "pics or it didn't happen," people may not believe the fox about something that happened to him.
3. With your animals in place, write your story, bearing in mind the tone and style of the fables we are studying.

Example

In ancient Greece, fables were often very short. The contemporary examples we are looking at today are longer, but here is an example, one of the most famous of Aesop's fables:

The tortoise and the Hare

The hare laughed at the tortoise's feet but the tortoise declared, 'I will beat you in a race!' The hare replied, 'Those are just words. Race with me, and you'll see! Who will mark out the track and serve as our umpire?' 'The fox,' replied the tortoise, 'since she is honest and highly intelligent.' When the time for the race had been decided upon, the tortoise did not delay, but immediately took off down the race course. The hare, however, lay down to take a nap, confident in the speed of his feet. Then, when the hare eventually made his way to the finish line, he found that the tortoise had already won.

The story shows that many people have good natural abilities which are ruined by idleness; on the other hand, sobriety, zeal and perseverance can prevail over indolence. (trans. Laura Gibbs)