

# BOOKNOTES

EDUCATORS GUIDE

## fabulous fables

Fables, tales, and parables belong to the rich folklore of all cultures. Whether told around a campfire, or read as bedtime stories, these tales with moral lessons have been a part of childhood throughout the ages. It remains important for young students to study folklore so as to grasp the relationship between story and the human experience.

## about the books

Candace Fleming writes contemporary stories built around Aesop's fables in *The Fabled Fourth Graders of Aesop Elementary School*. No one wants to teach the fourth graders until the amazing Mr. Jupiter comes along. He undertakes the task with humor, and along the way the fourth graders learn many lessons, including "He laughs best who laughs last;" "Be careful what you wish for—it might come true;" and "Slow and steady wins the race."

*A Necklace of Raindrops and Other Stories* by Joan Aiken includes eight imaginative stories where readers travel the world over on the back of a dolphin, a magic mat, a flying apple pie, the back of a tiger, a top a patchwork quilt, and aboard a train that stops at a lonely desert depot.

In *The Tale of Tales* by Tony Mitton, Monkey, Elephant, and all of their jungle friends travel down the Story Road in search of Volcano Valley where it is rumored they can hear the Greatest Tale of all. Along the way, they each have a special story to tell.

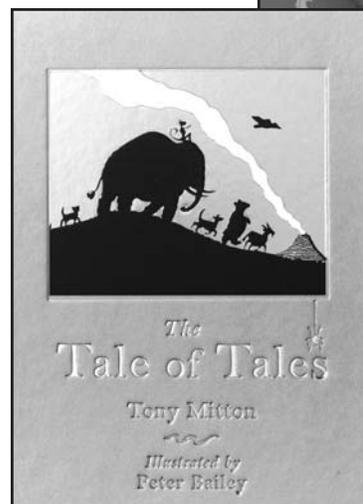
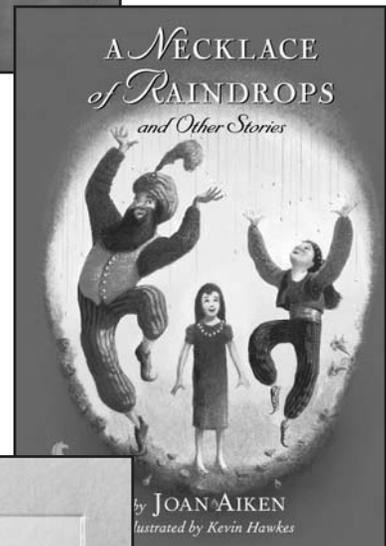


**The Fabled Fourth Graders of Aesop Elementary School**  
Grades 2–6

Schwartz & Wade HC:  
978-0-375-83672-5  
(0-375-83672-1)  
GLB: 978-0-375-93672-2  
(0-375-93672-6)

**A Necklace of Raindrops and Other Stories**  
Grades 1–5

Yearling PB: 978-0-440-41850-4  
(0-440-41850-X)



**The Tale of Tales**  
Grades K–7

David Fickling Books HC:  
978-0-385-75016-5  
(0-385-75016-1)

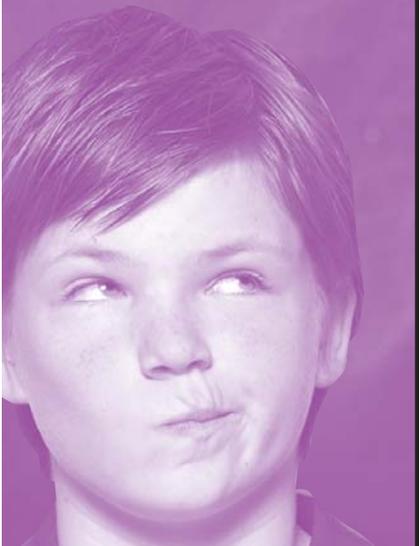
Visit Teachers @ Random at [www.randomhouse.com/teachers](http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers)

## pre-reading activity

Engage students in a discussion about the characteristics of a fable. Divide the class into small groups and give each group a fable to read. Ask them to apply the characteristics of a fable to their story. Allow the groups to share their fables and their literary analysis with the class.

## questions for group discussion

- Traditionally, fables are intended to mold attitudes toward moral and ethical behaviors. What are the moral and ethical issues in Fleming's fables and Aiken's stories? Discuss how the authors' shape the readers' responses to the issues in each story.
- The moral in a fable is usually drawn from one simple act. Identify the simple act in each of Fleming's fables.
- Explain the moral in "Mr. Jupiter Goes Fourth" in *The Fabled Fourth Graders of Aesop Elementary School*. (p. 6) How does the title of this fable have a double meaning?
- There is a bully in Fleming's story "Please Don't Tease Ashley Z." (p. 67) Explain how the moral "One good turn deserves another" is a good lesson in dealing with bullies. Who are the bullies in *A Necklace of Raindrops* by Joan Aiken? How might the moral in Fleming's story apply to Aiken's stories as well?
- Most fables have a good guy and a bad guy, a wise man and a fool. Identify the good and bad characters in each of the stories. Which book deals mostly with wise and foolish characters? Discuss the wisest character in *The Fabled Fourth Graders of Aesop Elementary School*.
- Characters in fables are often flat or one-dimensional. How is this especially true in *A Necklace of Raindrops* and *The Tale of Tales*? Analyze the characters in *The Fabled Fourth Graders of Aesop Elementary School*. Which character does the reader know the best? How is this character consistent in each of Fleming's stories?
- What is the difference between *silly* and *foolish*? The moral lessons of many fables are expressed through a silly act. How does Fleming use silliness to convey the message in her fables? What are the silliest acts in Aiken's stories? Discuss why it is better to learn a lesson through laughter.
- Fables, parables, and tales are closely related because they are each instructive. A tale is not always short, and does not necessarily supply a moral lesson. A parable usually has a hidden meaning, and a fable conveys a clear moral warning. Discuss whether, by definition, the stories in *A Necklace of Raindrops* and *The Tale of Tales* fit the genre of tale or fable. Why are fables, tales, and parables considered folklore?
- What is the message in *The Tale of Tales*? How do the animals in this book convey friendship and a sense of purpose?
- Setting is secondary in most fables because emphasis is on the moral lessons learned through a character's actions. How might Fleming's fables be different if set outside of Aesop Elementary School? What does the jungle setting in *The Tale of Tales* contribute to the story? Consider the cover of *A Necklace of Raindrops* and make an assumption about the setting.



## connecting to the curriculum

**English/Language Arts**—Ask students to pick one of the following moral lessons and create a contemporary fable:

- Try before you trust
- Don't put all your eggs in one basket
- A stitch in time saves nine
- Every truth has two sides
- The memory of a good deed lives
- Beauty is only skin deep

There is no clear moral to the stories in *A Necklace of Raindrops*. Ask students to write and illustrate a moral found in each of the stories.

Bring newspapers to class, and have students find a story that could convey a moral lesson to the reader. Ask them to rewrite the newspaper story as a fable. Allow students to share their newspaper story and read aloud their fable in class.

**Social Studies**—Have students research the folklore of one of the following countries: India, China, Japan, Vietnam, Kenya, Peru, Israel, or Mexico. Have them write a fable drawn from a folk story that is unique to the country.

**Drama**—Divide the class into small groups and ask them to write and perform a one-act play based on one of the fables in *The Fabled Fourth Graders of Aesop Elementary School*.

Play charades with fables. Ask students to select a favorite moral from any fable that they have read and pantomime it for the class.

Such morals may include:

- One good turn deserves another
- A man is known by the company he keeps
- Necessity is the mother of invention
- Not everything you see is what it appears to be
- He that has many friends has no friends
- Do not trust flatterers
- Little friends may prove great friends
- Self-conceit may lead to self-destruction
- Plodding wins the race

**Music**—Ask students to locate music that might be used in a film of *The Tale of Tales*. Suggest that they consider music from *The Carnival of the Animals*, *The Jungle Book*, *The Lion King*, or even jungle sounds effects. Have them bring the music to class, and share where in the story they would use it.

**Art**—Ask students to participate in a project called “The Fabled Art Show.” Each student should make a poster, using a medium of choice, that best illustrates a favorite fable. Instruct them to write the moral of the story at the bottom of the poster. Invite parents and students from other classes to the show.

## vocabulary/ use of language

The vocabulary in these books isn't difficult, but students should be encouraged to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them, taking clues from the context of the story. Such words may include:

**The Fabled Fourth Graders of Aesop Elementary**

**School:** *precocious* (p. 1), *obnoxious* (p. 9), *conscientious* (p. 31), *arabesque* (p. 37), *humiliation* (p. 58), *versatile* (p. 113), *contagious* (p. 146), and *buoyancy* (p. 148).

**A Necklace of Raindrops and Other Stories:**

*precipice* (p. 49), *oasis* (p. 52), *affronted* (p. 55), and *zither* (p. 63).

**The Tale of Tales:** *preen* (p. 10), *billow* (p. 37), *gaggle* (p. 101), *grotto* (p. 106), and *megaphone* (p. 108).

## related titles

### fables

#### All Stuck Up

Linda Hayward

Illustrated by Normand Charter

Fairy Tales & Fables • Animals • Humor  
Grades Preschool–2  
Random House PB: 978-0-679-80216-7  
(0-679-80216-9)

#### The Bremen-Town Musicians

Ilse Plume

Animals • Art, Music & Theater  
Classics • Fairy Tales & Fables  
Grades Preschool–3  
Dragonfly PB: 978-0-440-41456-8  
(0-440-41456-3)

#### The Greentail Mouse

Leo Lionni

Animals • Fairy Tales & Fables • Belonging  
Grades Preschool–3  
Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-82399-2  
(0-375-82399-9)

## internet resources

### Aesop's Fables Online Collection

[www.aesopfables.com](http://www.aesopfables.com)

This site has 655 fables, indexed by story and morals.

### Literature.org

[www.literature.org/authors/aesop/fables](http://www.literature.org/authors/aesop/fables)

Includes texts of fables and gives the moral to each story.

### University of Massachusetts

[www.umass.edu/aesop](http://www.umass.edu/aesop)

Traditional and contemporary computer illustrations by college art students for 35 of Aesop's classic fables.

### Wikipedia

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fable](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fable)

A brief history and explanation of the fable and its history.

## about the authors



Photo courtesy of the author

**Candace Fleming** is the author of many critically acclaimed and bestselling books for children, including *Muncha! Muncha! Muncha!* and *Ben Franklin's Almanac*. She lives in Illinois.



Photo Credit: Rob DeJoy

**Joan Aiken** was the author of more than 35 distinguished children's books, including the classic *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase*.



Photo courtesy of the author

**Tony Mitton** grew up in Africa, Germany, and Hong Kong and now lives in New Zealand. He began writing award-winning poetry for his children, Doris and Guthrie.

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