

Introduction to Fables

A fable is a short story, typically involving animals, intended to convey a useful moral or truth. The animals in fables generally represent people “types” (the greedy businessman, the braggart, the idiot) or personality traits, like gullible, hardworking, or melancholy (think Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh).

Most of us know the story about the tortoise and the hare:

There once was a speedy hare who bragged about how fast he could run. Tired of hearing him boast, Slow and Steady, the tortoise, challenged him to a race. All the animals in the forest gathered to watch.

Hare ran down the road for a while and then paused to rest. He looked back at Slow and Steady and cried out, "How do you expect to win this race when you are walking along at your slow, slow pace?"

Hare stretched himself out alongside the road and fell asleep, thinking, "There is plenty of time to relax."

Slow and Steady walked and walked. He never, ever stopped until he came to the finish line.

The animals who were watching cheered so loudly for Tortoise, they woke up Hare.

Hare stretched and yawned and began to run again, but it was too late. Tortoise was over the line.

After that, Hare always reminded himself, "Don't brag about your lightning pace, for Slow and Steady won the race!"



The story is one of over 655 other fables written by the author Aesop around 550 BCE. It is a brief tale that uses animals associated with definite traits (tortoise=slow; hare=fast) to communicate an easily understood moral: overconfidence leads to failure. Many other authors, including George Orwell, have written in the fable tradition over the years. It remains a simple way for even young children to understand a variety of life lessons through animals meant to represent single characters or character traits.