

The man, the boy and the donkey

Retold by Steve Williams

A man and his son were going to market with their donkey. The humans walked alongside the animal. It was a lovely summer day and all three were happy to be together. Along the road they passed a countryman who, when they had passed him, said: 'Fools! They own the donkey and yet they are walking.'

The father felt a little foolish so he lifted the boy onto the donkey and they carried on their way. Along the road they passed three men sitting under a tree, talking. One of them said: 'Look at that lazy boy, he lets his father walk while he rides.' The other men laughed as the walkers passed by.

The man again felt foolish. He ordered his boy to get off the donkey and got on himself. 'That's better,' he thought, 'now I'll get the respect I deserve.' They hadn't gone far when they passed two women. One of them said to the other: 'Shame on that lazy lout to let his poor little son trudge along while he rides all high and mighty like a lazy king.'

The man was stunned by this latest judgement against him. He stopped in the road, not knowing what to do. At last he pulled his boy up in front of him and they both rode the donkey.

When they arrived in town, passers-by began to jeer and point at them. The man stopped and asked what they were complaining about. Someone said: 'Aren't you ashamed of yourself for overloading that poor donkey. Look at the sweat on him?' The man and boy got off the donkey in despair. 'This is a DISASTER,' cried the man to no-one in particular. They sat, staring at the road in silence. Then they had the same idea at the same time.

They cut down a pole, tied the donkey's feet to it, and raised the pole and the donkey onto their shoulders. They strode forward as proudly as they could, ignoring the laughter of all who met them. As they crossed Market Bridge, the donkey got one of his feet loose, kicked out and caused the boy to drop his end of the pole. The donkey plunged over the side of the bridge and drowned. The father and son could do nothing to save him.

An old man who was following them said:

- **'Please all, and you will please none.'**
- **'Better to feel foolish than harm another.'**
- **'If you take the advice of others, you shouldn't blame yourself.'**
- **'Doing what is right will always seem foolish to some.'**

Teacher's notes

This is our key document for a series of traditional stories that can be put to use as stimulating resources for discussion. We've chosen a variety of fables and retold them in a slightly more modern style. Then, instead of providing one 'moral' at the end of the text, we give several to choose from. Some of the morals for the tale contradict each other.

What to do for each of the fables

Put the children into small groups, then

1. Ask the pupils to decide which moral they would choose as the most suitable for the story, with reasons for their choice.
2. If there is time, ask the pupils if they can they think of their own alternative suitable moral for the fable.
3. Afterwards, if the children find the story interesting, ask them to create questions about the fable, choose one and discuss it together as a whole group in the normal way for p4c.

Other fables in this series

Fable: [The fox and the grapes](#)

Fable: [The mother and the wolf](#)

Fable: [The bat, the birds and the beasts](#)

Fable: [The boy and the nettles](#)

Fable: [The dog and the wolf](#)