

Aesop and the Bullψ– A Fable for Our Times

by: Joey Madia

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set design: James Corpel

set painting: Ifat Shatzky

starring: Jim Folly and Debby Stewart

produced by: Youth Stages, LLC

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Former actors Dennis DaPrile and Bethany Fustos as the Tortoise and the Hare.
Photo: illumadigital.com



What should you do when faced with a bully? This new treatment of Aesop fables is set in a small Greek village in 600 BC. Demetra and the children of the Academy, the audience, are threatened by Diabom the village bully. Aesop arms his friend Demetra with the skills and techniques she needs to stand up for herself by enacting *The North Wind and the Sun*, *The Tortoise and the Hare*, and *Androcles and the Lion*...with special attention to *The Golden Rule*. Children love participating as they learn!

BEFORE THE SHOW

• Aesop •

Very little is actually known about Aesop. He was probably born in 620 B.C. (the birthplace is disputed) which would be over 2,600 years ago. It is believed he was born a slave and that he had two masters on the island of Samos. At some point he was freed because of his learning, wit, and storytelling skills. (There is also some question about whether he may have been ugly or deformed.)

He made his way to the palace of King Croesus of Lydia, where he became one of the monarch's trusted ambassadors, helping him with difficult affairs of state. As such, Aesop traveled to Corinth, Athens, and Delphi among other places.

It is believed he was killed by the Delphinians on one of these trips. One story says that he was given a large sum of gold by King Croesus to distribute among the citizens of Delphi. Aesop found the Delphinians to be so greedy, that he did not divide the gold, but rather sent it back to King Croesus! The Delphinians, were so enraged that despite his official status, they executed him as a public criminal.

At Youth Stages we are thankful for the life and legacy of Aesop and his fables!

• Greek Theatre •



The remains of the Hellenistic theatre at Epidaurus. This is the best preserved of all the Greek theatres.

All western theatre can claim its roots in Greek drama. The word "theatre" comes from the Greek word, *theatron*, or "watching place." The theatres in Greece were half-circular, open-air structures, built on the slope of a hill. At the bottom of the hill was a large circular area called the *orchestra*, or "dancing place."

These hillside theatres sat 15,000-18,000 people!! The open structures allowed the audience to see the actors, each other, and the surrounding countryside. Greeks knew it was very important for everyone to see and hear, and in 400-500 B.C., there were no such things as electric lights or body mics! The sun provided the light and the theatres were built to have excellent acoustics. (In the theatre in Epidaurus-see picture on previous page-if you drop a penny in the orchestra, the tiny "ping" it makes when it hits the orchestra can be heard from the top row of the audience!)

Greek theatre utilized a chorus, a large group of people who spoke in unison and rhythm, to depict a single entity. In 500 B.C., Thespis created an innovative style where one actor had solo speeches. In 471 B.C., the dramatist Aeschylus added a second actor. Eventually a third actor was added.

So the actors could be seen from far away, they often wore large platform shoes and masks. The comedy and tragedy masks, that have come to symbolize all theatre today- including the Youth Stages logo- come from the masks worn in those two forms of ancient Greek theatre, comedy and tragedy.



With such a large space and only two actors, these masks were of utmost importance. The actors each played numerous roles so the masks were large and colorful and allowed the audience to know which character the actor was pretending to be. The emotions and age of the character were exaggerated on the face of the masks. The masks covered the actor's entire face, but could not hinder the dialogue, so the mask's mouth was often enlarged and quite wide. These masks were made of cork or linen, so none have survived, but we know what they looked like from the pottery and sculpture of the time.

Marble relief sculpture of Menander with three masks.

• Aesop Fables •

found in *Aesop and the Bully-A Fable for Our Times*

Teachers: For a better understanding of the play, please read these fables to the students prior to the show.

The Bundle of Sticks

A certain Father had a family of Sons, who were forever quarreling among themselves. No words he could say did the least good, so he cast about in his mind for some striking example that should make them see that discord would lead them to misfortune.

One day, when the quarreling had been much more violent than usual and each of the Sons was moping in a surly manner, he asked one of them to bring him a bundle of sticks. Then handing the bundle to each of his Sons in turn he told them to try to break it. But although each one tried his best, none was able to do so. The Father then untied the bundle and gave the sticks to his Sons to break one by one. This they did very easily.

"My Sons," said the Father, "do you not see how certain it is that if you agree with each other and help each other, it will be impossible for your enemies to injure you? But if you are divided among yourselves, you will be no stronger than a single stick in that bundle."

In unity there is strength.

The North Wind and the Sun

The North Wind and the Sun had a quarrel about which of them was the stronger. While they were disputing with much heat and bluster, a Traveler passed along the road wrapped in a cloak.

"Let us agree," said the Sun, "that he is the stronger who can strip that Traveler of his cloak."

"Very well," growled the North Wind, and at once sent a cold, howling blast against the Traveler. With the first gust of wind the ends of the cloak whipped about the Traveler's body. But he immediately wrapped it closely around him, and the harder the Wind blew, the tighter he held it to him. The North Wind tore angrily at the cloak, but all his efforts were in vain.

Then the Sun began to shine. At first his beams were gentle, and in the pleasant warmth after the bitter cold of the North Wind, the Traveler unfastened his cloak and let it hang loosely from his shoulders. The Sun's rays grew warmer and warmer. The man took off his cap and mopped his brow. At last he became so heated that he pulled off his cloak, and, to escape the blazing sunshine, threw himself down in the welcome shade of a tree by the roadside.

Gentleness and kind persuasion win where force and bluster fail.

The Tortoise and the Hare

A Hare was making fun of the Tortoise one day for being so slow.

"Do you ever get anywhere?" he asked with a mocking laugh.

"Yes," replied the Tortoise, "and I get there sooner than you think. I'll run you a race and prove it."

The hare was much amused at the idea of running a race with the Tortoise, but for the fun of the thing, he agreed. So the fox, who had consented to act as judge, marked the distance and started the runners off.

The Hare was soon far out of sight, and to make the Tortoise feel very deeply how ridiculous it was for him to try and race with a Hare, he lay down beside the course to take a nap until the Tortoise should catch up.

The Tortoise meanwhile kept going slowly but steadily, and, after a time, passed the place where the Hare was sleeping. But the Hare kept on very peacefully; and when at last he did wake up, the Tortoise was near the goal. The Hare now ran his swiftest, but he could not overtake the Tortoise in time.

Slow and steady wins the race. OR The race is not always to the swift.

Androcles and the Lion

A slave named Androcles once escaped from his master and fled to the forest. As he was wandering about there he came upon a Lion lying down moaning and groaning. At first he turned to flee, but finding that the Lion did not pursue him, he turned back and went up to him. As he came near, the Lion put out his paw, which was all swollen and bleeding. Androcles found that a huge thorn had got into it, and was causing all the pain. He pulled out the thorn and bound up the paw of the Lion, who was soon able to rise and lick the hand of Androcles like a dog. Then the Lion took Androcles to his cave, and every day used to bring him meat from which to live.

But shortly afterwards both Androcles and the Lion were captured, and the slave was sentenced to be thrown to the Lion, after the latter had been kept without food for several days. The Emperor and all his Court came to see the spectacle, and Androcles was led out into the middle of the arena. Soon the Lion was let loose from his den, and rushed bounding and roaring towards his victim. But as soon as he came near to Androcles he recognized his friend, and fawned upon him, and licked his hands like a friendly dog. The Emperor, surprised at this, summoned Androcles to him, who told him the whole story. Whereupon the slave was pardoned and freed, and the Lion let loose to his native forest.

Gratitude is the sign of noble souls.

The Golden Rule

*The Golden Rule can be found in the teachings of; Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and African Religious Traditions!*¹ Aesop tells it like this:

The Fox and the Stork

The Fox one day thought of a plan to amuse himself at the expense of the Stork, at whose odd appearance he was always laughing.

"You must come and dine with me today," he said to the Stork, smiling to himself at the trick he was going to play. The Stork gladly accepted the invitation and arrived in good time with a very good appetite.

For dinner the Fox served soup. But it was set out in a very shallow dish, and all the Stork could do was wet the very tip of his bill. Not a drop of soup could he get. But the Fox lapped it up easily, and, to increase the disappointment of the Stork, made a great show of the enjoyment.

The hungry Stork was much displeased at the trick, but he was a calm, even-tempered fellow and saw no good in flying into a rage. Instead, not long afterward, he invited the Fox to dine with him in turn. The Fox arrived promptly at the time that had been set, and the Stork served a fish dinner that had a very appetizing smell. But it was served in a tall jar with a very narrow neck. The Stork could easily get at the food with his long bill, but all the Fox could do was lick the outside of the jar, and sniff at the delicious odor. And when the Fox lost his temper, the Stork said calmly:

Do not play tricks on your neighbors unless you can stand the same treatment yourself.

Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.

When you watch *Aesop and the Bully- A Fable for Our Times* there are two places in the script where two other Aesop fables are alluded to...see if you can find them! (Aesop hints toward writing *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* and *The Ants and the Grasshopper*!)

• Bullying •

Prior to watching the show, here is some information you should know.

What is bullying?

Bullying is defined as aggressive behavior (words, actions, or social exclusion) that intentionally hurts or harms another person. The behavior occurs repetitively and there is a power imbalance; the bully is either physically, verbally, or socially stronger than the victim.²

There are four types of bullying.

Physical Bullies hit, kick, punch or otherwise physically hurt their victims.

Verbal Bullies insult, name-call, and tease constantly.

Relational Bullies convince their peers to exclude or reject others, often by spreading rumors.

Reactive Victims taunt bullies and then fight back claiming self-defense.²

Why do people bully?

- They may see it as a way of being popular.
- Maybe they think it makes them look tough and in charge.
- Someone might bully to get attention or things.
- A person might do it to make other people afraid of them.
- Maybe the bully is jealous of the person they are bullying.
- Maybe the bully has been bullied by someone else.³

What are some signs of bullying?

- **name-calling**
- **saying or writing nasty things about someone**
- **leaving someone out of activities**
- **purposely/repeatedly not talking to someone**
- **threatening someone**
- **making someone feel uncomfortable or scared**
- **taking or damaging someone's things**
- **hitting or kicking someone**
- **making someone do things they don't want to do**³

How do you stand up to a bully?

Here are some strategies that can help:

- Act brave.** When you're scared of another person, you're probably not feeling your bravest. But some times just acting brave is enough to stop a bully. If you walk by as though you're not afraid and hold your head high, a bully may be less likely to give you trouble.
- Ignore a bully.** Simply ignoring a bully's threats and walking away robs the bully of his or her fun. Bullies want a big reaction to their teasing and meanness. Acting as if you don't notice and don't care is like giving no reaction at all, and this just might stop a bully's behavior.
- Stand up for yourself.** Kids can stand up for themselves with words by telling the bully to stop it, and then walk away. Kids also can stand up for each other by telling a bully to stop teasing or scaring someone else, and then walk away together.
- Tell an adult.** If you are being bullied, it's very important to tell an adult. Teachers, principals, parents, and lunchroom helpers at school can all help to stop bullying.
- Be a buddy.** Kids who are being bullied can use the buddy system. Make a plan to walk with a friend or two on the way to school or recess or lunch or wherever you think you might meet the bully. Offer to do the same for a friend who's having trouble with a bully.
- Don't bully back.** Don't hit, kick, name-call, or push back to deal with someone bullying you or your friends. Fighting back just satisfies a bully and it's dangerous, too, because someone could get hurt. It's best to stay with others, stay safe, and get help from an adult.⁴

Are you a bully?

- Do you like to hurt other people or take their things?
- Do you like to insult, push around, or tease other children?
- Have you ever made mean faces or bad hand signs to others?
- Do you spread rumors or say mean things about others behind their back?
- Are you bigger and stronger than other people your age? Do you sometimes use your size and strength to get your way?
- Have you been bullied by someone in the past and feel like you have to make up for it by doing the same thing to others?
- Do you whisper secrets to a friend in front of another person and then not share the secret with him or her on purpose?
- Have you purposely not invited someone to hang out with you and your friends?
- Have you been or are you currently part of a clique (a selected group of kids)? Are you exclusive about whom you can and cannot be friends with and have you not let others join?
- Do you often make fun of others because they are "different" from you or your friends? (Example: they have glasses, ugly clothes, bad hair, or a different race/ethnicity or religion).
- Have you ever threatened to hurt someone?
- Have you ever punched, shoved, or hit another boy or girl?
- Do you avoid thinking about how other people might feel if you say or do hurtful things to them?⁵

How not to be a bully!

- **Apologize** to people you've bullied, and follow it up by being friendly to them. They may not trust you right away, but eventually they'll see that you're for real.
- **Explore ways to boost your self-esteem** if you're having a hard time feeling good about yourself. Explore any particular talent you have; playing basketball, drawing, playing soccer, acting, building models, competing in math competitions... anything that might develop your self-esteem. Pick up a new hobby, do volunteer work, or get involved with a sport or the school play.
- **Talk to a school counselor** if you feel like you're having trouble controlling your feelings, especially anger.⁶

There are many reasons to kick the bully habit. Many bullies get into trouble in their younger years with teachers, principals, and friends. As they get older, they often end up in trouble with the law, because bullies are more apt to smoke and use other drugs, carry weapons, and commit violent crimes. Bullies grow up into adults who bully their families, friends, and co-workers, causing all sorts of problems with relationships and careers.⁶

It's hard to think about the future when you're feeling something here and now, but take a moment to see how your behavior may be laying down some pretty negative groundwork.⁶

As a Bystander...Be a Friend

- If you see someone else being bullied you should always try to stop it. If you do nothing, you're saying that bullying is okay with you.
- It's always best to treat others the way you would like to be treated. (You'd want someone to help you, right?)
- Show/tell the bully that you think what they're doing is mean and hurtful.
- Help the person being bullied to tell an adult they can trust.⁷

REMEMBER THE THREE R's TO BULLYING:

- **RECOGNIZE** that the behavior is bullying
- **REFUSE** the bullying- Don't let yourself or someone else be bullied.
- **REPORT** the bullying. Tell an adult!!

AFTER THE SHOW

• Post-show Discussion •

The similarities and differences between ancient Greek drama and this contemporary Youth Stages production

Recall or reread the section on Greek Drama (from "Before the Show").

- How did the Youth Stages production of *Aesop and the Bully* parallel ancient Greek drama?
- How was the production different from ancient Greek drama?

After the students have engaged in their own observations, see how many parallels they made and share the following with them:

- Ancient Greek drama was a half circle. The director, Jean Prall Rosolino, chose to direct the show as a "thrust" style show with the audience in front of and on the two sides of the actors.
- Since Youth Stages is a touring theatre company, we perform in multipurpose or program rooms in schools, libraries, recreation centers, places of worship, etc. We do not have a set location where the audience comes to us, so our performance space is chosen by the school or library we perform in.
- We use only natural lighting and the actor's voices are not amplified by microphones.
- As with the theatre of Aeschylus, Youth Stages uses only two actors. These two actors play numerous parts by donning a variety of masks.
- The masks showed the various characters. Similar to ancient Greek masks, Rebecca Kelly made these masks out of paper and paper mache.
- The four animal masks used by audience members (bull, rooster, sheep, pig) as well as North Wind, Sun, Androcles, and the Lion, covered the actor's faces. However they were hand held on sticks and could be easily removed from in front of the face.
- Youth Stages chose not to have the masks cover the actor's faces the way ancient Greek masks did. Our audiences are preschoolers- grade 3 and some younger children are frightened by masks that cover actor's faces. Borrowing from Greek tradition Diabom's and Aesop's masks had enlarged mouths. In our case, these oversized mouths revealed the actor, Jim Folly's, entire face. Demetra's mask, played by Debby Stewart, as well as the Tortoise and the Hare were worn above the forehead. In ancient Greek theatre, in addition to having the actors on platform shoes, the masks often extended 6" above the forehead to add height to the actors so they could be more readily seen from such distance. Our masks rise 6" above the actor's heads.
- You, the audience, served as the chorus! You chanted in unison "Go, Hare, go" and "Go, go, don't be slow!" among other lines. Youth Stages is a participatory theatre company (that means our audiences speak and move and join us at certain points in our shows). It made sense to have our audience serve as our chorus.

• Creative Writing •

For Preschoolers

Draw a picture of your favorite character or your favorite part of the show. Tell your teacher so she/he can write your thoughts next to your drawing. Mail it to Youth Stages at the address below!

For Kindergarten and 1st graders

Write a letter to the actors, Debby Stewart and Jim Folly. Let them know:

- your favorite/least favorite character
- your favorite/least favorite part of the story
- what you liked/disliked about the show

For 2nd-3rd grade:

Write a newspaper-style review of the show, *Aesop and the Bully- A Fable for our Times*

Be sure to include:

- whether you thought the simple staging worked for the play
- what you thought of the masks and costumes
- what you thought of the quality of the acting

Send your review or letter to:

Youth Stages, LLC
287 Walnut Lane
Princeton, NJ 08540-3459

More ideas...

Create a newspaper that will run your review. The Samos Gazette? What might a newspaper look like in 600 B.C.? What might there be ads for? What other top stories might run in your issue?

Write your own scene....

• Make up/Write your own Fable •

This can be done individually or as a group process. (Teachers: You may prefer one of the following formats, depending on the age/abilities of your class.)

Preschoolers: As a full group, each student gets the opportunity to add-on one part of the story, until the entire class makes up a group fable. Or have the children create the story as a group. The teacher serves as Scribe!

1st-2nd grade Each child writes his or her own fable.

2nd-3rd grade In small groups of no more than five, students discuss and plan their own fable.

Think up a moral (or take one of Aesop's below) and write a story to go with it. Remember:

- Use *animal characters*
- Limit your writing to only *two characters!*
- Try to *create dialogue*, not just narration. Make sure the characters talk to each other!
- A play requires action. What are the characters *doing?*

Possible morals:

- "Deeds count, not boasting words." Actions speak louder than words.
- "Always stop to think whether your fun may not be the cause of another's unhappiness."
- "Liars are not believed, even when they speak the truth."
- "You are judged by the company you keep."

• Make Your Own Mask •

This can be used as a separate visual arts activity, or the masks created can be used to dramatize fables.

You will need:

- a paper plate
- a craft stick
- markers
- construction paper scraps
- tape
- glue
- any of the following and/or other things you can think of!
- glitter
- wrapping paper
- yarn
- feathers
- buttons
- paint

Decide if your paper plate will be used whole or cut it in half. Have an adult cut eye holes for you, large enough to see out of. Tape or glue the craft stick to it, to make a hand-held mask. Decorate the mask however you want with the array of items listed above. You can decorate only one side or have a two-sided mask. After it has dried, use it to act out your fable!

Since humans have been on this planet, masks have been used for: ceremonies, rituals, actors, Halloween, dance, and for other reasons. The artist who made the masks for Youth Stages, Rebecca Kelly, got her inspiration from: contemporary artists, ancient artists, children's drawings, Aesop book illustrations. She went to The Met and the Newark Museum as well as local stores (Sojourner's in Lambertville) and made sketches.

• Discussion on Bullying •

Hopefully you discussed bullying with your students prior to the show. Here are some idea starters for a post-show discussion with your group.

- Do you think Diabom was a bully?
- If yes, how did Diabom bully Demetra and the children of the Academy.
- What strategies did Demetra use to deal with Diabom? *If the students do not recall all of them:*
 - Believe in yourself/Be true to who you are.
 - Gentle persuasion wins where force fails.
 - The Golden rule: Treat others the way you want to be treated- with kindness and respect. (Do unto others as you would like other to do unto you.)
 - Stick together- Help each other when facing a bully.
- How do you think you will act the next time there is a bullying situation at school or elsewhere? What might you say? What might you do?

• Role Playing •

If you would like to have a Youth Stages actor-educator come into your classroom or group and have the children dramatize some fables or enact some anti-bullying role-playing scenes, call or e-mail us:

(609) 430-9000 • manager@youthstages.com

1. <http://www.unification.net/ws/theme015.htm>

2. *Odd Kid Out: When your child is left out or bullied,* Corrine O'Hara & Elizabeth Casparian, HiTops, Princeton

3. <http://www.nobully.org.nz/advicek.htm#seven>

5. <http://www.4girls.gov/bullying/quiz.bullying.cfm>

6. <http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/friends/bullies/article6.html>

7. <http://www.nobully.org.nz/advicek.htm#seven>