

Le Corbeau et le Renard

THE RAVEN AND THE FOX

A LITTLE BACKGROUND

A crow stands on top of a tree with a prized **cheese** in his beak. A fox, drawn by the cheese's smell, **flatters** the crow with praise for his beauty and supposedly lovely voice. The vain crow, eager to prove the fox right, opens his beak to **sing**, dropping the cheese straight into the fox's waiting paws.

Written during the **reign of Louis XIV** (17th century France), the fable reflects the societal emphasis on **wit** and **courtly manners**.

Ultimately, the story teaches a timeless moral: beware of **flattery** and avoid excessive **pride**, as they can lead to one's downfall.



Jean de La Fontaine was a famous French poet who lived in the 1600s. He's best known for his fables, which are short stories with animal characters that teach moral lessons. Even today, it is a staple of French poetry: ask any French person, they likely have learned Le Corbeau et le Renard in school!

Difficulty
Very Easy

Author
Jean de La Fontaine
(1621-1695)

Publication
1668

Maître Corbeau, sur un arbre perché,

Tenait en son bec un fromage.

Maître Renard, par l'odeur alléché,

Lui tint à peu près ce langage :

« Hé ! bonjour, Monsieur du Corbeau.

Que vous êtes joli ! que vous me semblez beau !

Sans mentir, si votre ramage

Se rapporte à votre plumage,

Vous êtes le Phénix des hôtes de ces bois. »

À ces mots le Corbeau ne se sent pas de joie ;

Et pour montrer sa belle voix,

Il ouvre un large bec, laisse tomber sa proie.

Le Renard s'en saisit, et dit : « Mon bon Monsieur,

Apprenez que tout flatteur

Vit aux dépens de celui qui l'écoute :

Cette leçon vaut bien un fromage, sans doute. »

Le Corbeau, honteux et confus,

Jura, mais un peu tard, qu'on ne l'y prendrait plus.

Jean de la Fontaine,
Fables de La Fontaine, 1668



Master Raven, on a perched tree,

Was holding a cheese in his beak.

Spoken Language

Master Fox, enticed by the smell,

Told him roughly the following:

The use of the term 'langage' as a synonym for statement is associated with Old French. Today, the word 'langage' refers to language, or sometimes to the way of speaking.

"Hey! hello, Mister of the Raven.

How pretty you are! How beautiful you seem to me!

Without lying, if your voice

Reflects your plumage,

You are the Phoenix of the hosts of these woods."

At these words the Raven feels overwhelmed with joy;

And to show his beautiful voice,

He opens a wide beak, dropping his prey.

The Fox seizes it, and says: "My good Sir,

Learn that every flatterer

Lives at the expense of the one who listens to him:

This lesson is well worth a cheese, no doubt."

The Raven, ashamed and confused,

Promised, though a little late, that they would not catch him at it again.

The word 'me' before a verb equals the words 'me', 'to me' or 'myself' after a verb in English.
Je me fais à manger : I make myself food.

This wording, taken from Old French, can lead to confusion: the word 'pas' is today associated with negation, not accentuation.

Verb

The verb 'apprendre' is here in **imperative**, meaning that an **order** is given. In imperative, the subject is not written, but the verb is **conjugated**. See p.92 Verb Toolbox.

Culture

In France, with the influence of its literature and that of the rest of the world, the raven is generally associated with darkness and bad omens.



La Cigale et la Fourmi

THE CICADA AND THE ANT

A LITTLE BACKGROUND

"La Cigale et la Fourmi" tells the story of a carefree *cicada* who spends the summer **singing** while the diligent ant gathers **food** for winter. When winter arrives, the cicada finds herself hungry and **begs** the ant for help. The ant, however, reminds the cicada of her idleness during the summer and **refuses** to share her hard-earned provisions. The fable teaches the importance of **hard work**, preparation, and the consequences of not **planning** for the future. Once again, most of your French friends have learned that one in school for sure!



Jean de La Fontaine again! Many of his fables are still familiar to French people today, and his ageless, simple morals have enabled his writings to stand the test of time. He died in 1695 and is buried today in the Père Lachaise Cemetery, in the 20th arrondissement of Paris, the most visited necropolis in the world.



Difficulty
Very Easy

Author

Publication
1668



1 La Cigale, ayant chanté
2 Tout l'été,
3 Se trouva fort dépourvue
4 Quand la bise fut venue :
5 Pas un seul petit morceau
6 De mouche ou de vermisseau.
7 Elle alla crier famine
8 Chez la Fourmi sa voisine,
9 La priant de lui prêter
10 Quelque grain pour subsister
11 Jusqu'à la saison nouvelle.
12 « Je vous paierai, lui dit-elle,
13 Avant l'Oût, foi d'animal,
14 Intérêt et principal. »

15 La Fourmi n'est pas prêteuse :
16 C'est là son moindre défaut.
17 « Que faisiez-vous au temps chaud ?
18 Dit-elle à cette emprunteuse.
19 — Nuit et jour à tout venant
20 Je chantais, ne vous déplaise.
21 — Vous chantiez ? J'en suis fort aise.
22 Eh bien ! Dansez maintenant. »

Jean de la Fontaine, *Fables de La Fontaine*, 1668

The Cicada, having sung

All summer,

Found herself quite at a loss

When the chill had come:

Not a single little piece

Of fly or worm.

She went crying out for food

At the Ant's house next door,

Begging her to lend her

Some grain to survive

Until the new season.

"I will pay you, she told her,

Before August, in the name of animal faith,

Interest and principal."

The Ant is not a lender:

That here is her lesser flaw.

"What were you doing in the hot weather?

She says to this borrower.

- Night and day to all comers

I was singing, you don't mind.

- You were singing? I am very glad for it.

Well then! Dance now."

Spoken Language

A

Culture

A

Grammar

Spoken Language

A



Verb

A

Le Pont Mirabeau

THE MIRABEAU BRIDGE

A LITTLE BACKGROUND

Written in the early 20th century, a time of great artistic change, Apollinaire's 'Le Pont Mirabeau' reflects on the nature of time and love. The poem, likely inspired by Apollinaire's own heartbreak, uses the image of a bridge to express a universal truth: love can be temporary, but the pain of loss endures.

Keeping experiencing sorrow, despite the world moving on, resonated with all the life struggles and changes of the times, especially the longing threat of the First World War. Apollinaire suggests that while everything changes, the human experience of loss remains constant.



Guillaume Apollinaire was a pioneering French poet of the early 20th century, known for his experimental style and his influence on modern art movements like Cubism and Surrealism. His life is marked by innovation and a tragic early death in the 1918 flu pandemic shortly after being injured in World War I.



1 **Sous** le pont Mirabeau **coule** la Seine

2 Et nos amours

3 Faut-il qu'il m'en **souvienne**

4 La joie **venait** toujours après la peine

5 Vienne la nuit sonne l'heure

6 Les jours s'en vont je demeure

7 Les mains **dans** les mains **restons** face à face

8 Tandis que sous

9 Le pont de nos bras **passe**

10 Des éternels regards l'**onde** si lasse

11 Vienne la nuit sonne l'heure

12 Les jours s'en vont je demeure

13 L'amour s'en va comme cette eau **courante**

14 L'amour s'en va

15 Comme la vie est lente

16 Et comme l'Espérance est **violente**

Under the Mirabeau bridge **flows** the Seine

And our romances

Must it remind me **of** them

Joy always came after sorrow

When the night comes the clock rings

The days go by I remain

Hands **in** hands let's remain face to face

While underneath

The bridge of our arms go by

Of eternal glances the wave so weary

When the night comes the clock rings

The days go by I remain

Love goes away like this running water

Love goes away

How slow is life

And how violent is Hope

Le Loup et l'Agneau

THE WOLF AND THE LAMB

A LITTLE BACKGROUND

Written during the reign of Louis XIV, a powerful and absolute monarch, "Le Loup et l'Agneau" is a critique of unchecked power and the abuse of authority. La Fontaine, through this fable, subtly condemns the injustices in his society, where the weak had little recourse against the strong.

The wolf represents those in power who manipulate the law to justify their actions, while the lamb symbolizes the vulnerable and innocent. The fable is a warning against the dangers of tyranny and a reminder that justice is often distorted by those who hold power.



Jean de La Fontaine died in Paris on April 13, 1695, at the age of 73, having lived a life dedicated to literature. He was buried in the famous Père Lachaise Cemetery, where his grave, alongside that of Molière, remains a site of pilgrimage for admirers of French literature to this day.



1 La raison du plus fort est toujours la meilleure :
2 Nous l'allons montrer tout à l'heure.
3 Un Agneau se désaltérait
4 Dans le courant d'une onde pure.
5 Un Loup survient à jeun, qui cherchait aventure,
6 Et que la faim en ces lieux attirait.
7 Qui te rend si hardi de troubler mon breuvage ?
8 Dit cet animal plein de rage :
9 Tu seras châtié de ta témérité.
10 Sire, répond l'Agneau, que Votre Majesté
11 Ne se mette pas en colère ;
12 Mais plutôt qu'elle considère
13 Que je me vas désaltérant
14 Dans le courant,
15 Plus de vingt pas au-dessous d'Elle ;
16 Et que par conséquent, en aucune façon,
17 Je ne puis troubler sa boisson.
18 Tu la troubles, reprit cette bête cruelle,
19 Et je sais que de moi tu médis l'an passé.
20 Comment l'aurais-je fait si je n'étais pas né ?
21 Reprit l'Agneau ; je tette encore ma mère

The rule of the strongest is always the best:

We will show this in a moment.

A Lamb was quenching his thirst

In the stream of a pure wave.

A Wolf on an empty stomach appears, seeking adventure,

And that hunger drew to these places.

Who makes you so bold as to disturb my drinking?

Said this animal full of rage:

You will be punished for your temerity.

Sire, replied the Lamb, may Your Majesty

Not become angry;

But rather consider

That I am quenching my thirst

In the stream,

More than twenty steps below Her;

And that therefore in no way

Could I disturb her drinking.

You are disturbing Her, answered that cruel beast,

And I know that last year you spoke evil of me.

How would I have done so if I had not been born?

Replied the Lamb; I still drink at my mother's breast

