

Fable

Definition of Fable

The word fable is derived from the Latin word *fibula*, which means “a story,” and a derivative of the word *fari*, which means “to speak.” Fable is a literary device that can be defined as a concise and brief story intended to provide a [moral](#) lesson at the end.

In literature, it is described as a didactic lesson given through some sort of animal story. In [prose](#) and [verse](#), a fable is described through plants, animals, forces, of nature, and inanimate objects by giving them human attributes wherein they demonstrate a moral lesson at the end.

Features of a Fable

A fable is intended to provide a moral story.

Fables often use animals as the main characters. They are presented with anthropomorphic characteristics, such as the ability to speak and to reason.

Fables personify the animal characters.

Examples of Fable in Literature

Example #1: *The Fox and the Crow* (By Aesop’s Fables)

“A crow was sitting on a branch of a tree with a piece of cheese in her beak when a fox observed her and set his wits to work to discover some way of getting the cheese. Coming and standing under the tree he looked up and said, ‘What a noble bird I see above me! Her beauty is without equal...’ Down came the cheese, of course, and the Fox, snatching it up, said, ‘You have a [voice](#), madam, I see: what you want is wits.’”

Aesop is probably the most notable author of famous examples of fable. Aesopian fables put emphasis on the social communications of human beings, and hence the morals he draws deal with realities of life. In this excerpt, Aesop gives a moral lesson that flatterers must not be trusted.

Example #2: *Animal Farm* (By George Orwell)

“Now, comrades, what is the nature of this life of ours? Let us face it: our lives are miserable, laborious, and short. We are born, we are given just so much food as will keep the breath in our bodies ... and the very instant that our usefulness has come to an end ... No animal in England knows the meaning of happiness or leisure after he is a year old. No animal in England is free. The life of an animal is misery and slavery ...”

Here, old Major is speaking to other animals. It is presented as the story of the development and emergence of Soviet communism, through an animal fable. He advises the animals to struggle against the humans, telling them that rebellion is the only feasible way out of their miserable situation.

Example #3: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (By S.T. Coleridge)

First Voice

“But tell me, tell me! speak again,
Thy soft response renewing —
What makes that ship drive on so fast?
What is the ocean doing?”

Second Voice

“Still as a slave before his lord,
The ocean hath no blast...
Up to the moon is cast —...
See! see! (I cried) she tacks no more...

“Without a breeze, without a tide,
She steadies with upright keel!”

The voices in this poem explain the moving ship without waves and wind. There is a supernatural force at work. This literary piece is one of the well-written fable examples that teach about penance, redemption, and sin. The killing of a bird symbolizes the original sin.

Example #4: *Gulliver's Travels* (By Jonathan Swift)

“I attempted to rise, but was not able to stir: for, as I happened to lie on my back, I found my arms and legs were strongly fastened on each side to the ground; and my hair, which was long and thick, tied down in the same manner ... In a little time I felt something alive moving on my left leg, which advancing gently forward over my breast, came almost up to my chin...”

Gulliver's Travels is a mixture of political [allegory](#), moral fable, mock [utopia](#), and social anatomy. In this excerpt, Captain Gulliver reaches an unknown place among strange creatures who speak a strange language. This is a type of modern fable intended to satirize political vices.

Function of Fable

The purpose of writing fables is to convey a moral lesson and message. Fables also give readers a chance to laugh at the follies of human beings, and they can be employed for the objective of [satire](#) and criticism. They are very helpful in teaching children good lessons based on examples. However, in literature, fables are used for didactic purposes at a much broader level.