

Ali Baba

A Reading A-Z Level Z1 Leveled Book
Word Count: 2,684

LEVELED BOOK • Z¹

Ali Baba

Connections

Writing

Write an essay analyzing how Morgiana's actions influence the series of events in the story.

Drama

Work in a group to rewrite *Ali Baba* as a script for a play. Perform the play for your class.

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**Multi
level
Y•Z⁰•Z²**

An Arabian Folktale
Retold by Lori Polydoros and Elizabeth Jane Pustilnik
Illustrated by Mike McCarthy

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Focus Question

Do the intentions of Ali Baba make his actions acceptable as opposed to those of the robbers? Why or why not?

Words to Know

accomplice	flabbergasted
acquiesced	incensed
candor	prosperous
condolences	spurious
destitute	suet
euphoric	unscrupulous

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Correlation

LEVEL Z1

Fountas & Pinnell	W-X
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	60



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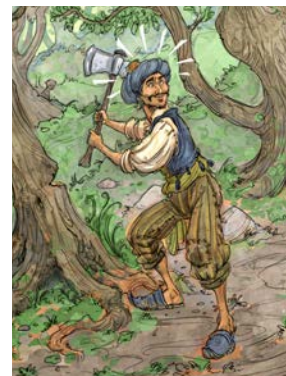
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Chapter I

Many years ago in a small town in Persia, a father divided his belongings equally between his two young sons, Cassim and Ali Baba. Although their property was equally divided, in no way would fortune treat them alike.

Cassim married Vashti, the widow of a wealthy innkeeper, and worked managing their inn. While husband and wife were **prosperous**, they hardly saw each other in the opulent mansion they shared in town. Ali Baba, on the other hand, was wed to Fatima, the daughter of a poor shepherd, and was employed as a woodcutter. They lived in a small shack but nevertheless shared a life full of love and happiness.

One warm summer afternoon deep in the forest adjacent to town, Ali Baba was cutting wood to sell. As he swung his axe into the trunk of a tree, he hummed to himself. The ground



began to rumble, startling Ali. He recognized the sound of horses' hooves—many horses, by the sound of it, and they were approaching fast! Grabbing his axe, Ali quickly scaled a tree and hid in its leafy foliage. There he silently watched and waited.

From this vantage point, Ali saw no fewer than forty men on horseback halt not far from his hiding place, dismount, tie up their horses, and lift heavy saddlebags onto their shoulders. From their unsavory look, Ali surmised that the men were robbers and their saddlebags contained stolen loot.



The group convened below the shade of a tree that had a large, craggy boulder at its base. Their leader was obvious, for he towered over the others and looked crueler. As he approached the boulder, he uttered a strange phrase—“Open, sesame!”

Ali watched as the boulder swiftly slid open to reveal a cave. *What kind of magic am I witnessing?* Ali thought. The thieves hurriedly disappeared inside the cave.

Ali Baba held his breath as his mind raced: *This must be their secret hideaway!*

Subsequently, the men and their leader exited the cave. He heard the leader call out, “Close, sesame!” and observed as the boulder slid back to mask the cave’s entrance. The men then hastily mounted their horses and galloped away.

Chapter 2

Flabbergasted, Ali Baba remained in the tree until he felt sure it was safe to move again. Still wary, he gingerly descended and stood in front of the concealed rock door. Sweat trickled down his forehead and face, dripping onto his already soaked tunic. Curiosity made him want to speak the words and see what lay inside the cave, while fear of the thieves’ return held him at bay. At last, Ali Baba willed himself to recite the magic words—“Open, sesame.” The boulder creaked and then slid open to reveal a sight so magnificent that Ali nearly fell to his knees.

The cave wasn’t dark and gloomy, as he had expected, but spacious and well lit by a crack in the ceiling where sunlight poured in. Gathering his wits, Ali looked around at the bags upon bags of gold and silver coins, stacks of fine silk rugs, and chests overflowing with colorful gems surrounding him. From the sheer amount of treasure in the cave, Ali Baba surmised that the robbers must have built up the stash over generations.

Surely they won’t notice a few missing bags of gold and jewels, Ali thought. He gathered what treasure he could carry and exited the cave. Outside, he called, “Close, sesame,” and the boulder slid back.

Chapter 3

Fatima watched as Ali Baba carried stuffed bags into their humble shack. *These don't look like wood*, she thought. Beckoning her to sit beside him, Ali emptied the bags into a heap of gold coins and jewels on the floor. Fatima's eyes became wide. "Whom did you rob?" she gasped.

Ali Baba replied, "I am no robber, unless one who steals from robbers is also himself a robber." Fatima raised an eyebrow as he began to tell her the whole story.

After the story was told, Ali Baba and Fatima discussed what they should do with their newfound wealth. They couldn't spend it freely without raising suspicions, so they would have to keep it a secret by burying it in their garden. First, they decided to weigh it to estimate its worth. So Fatima went to Vashti and Cassim's mansion and asked to borrow a scale to weigh grain.

Vashti was suspicious about how the **destitute** Ali Baba and Fatima would have enough grain to warrant measuring with a scale, so she placed a bit of **suet** underneath the scale. Whatever they were weighing would stick to the suet. When Fatima returned the scale, Vashti discovered a gold coin stuck to the bottom. Where could Ali Baba and Fatima have found such a treasure?

Chapter 4

That evening, Cassim suspected that something was bothering his wife. "What is it, Vashti?"

She replied, "You'll never guess what happened. Your poor brother's wife came here to borrow a scale. What could those two have to weigh? I stuck some suet to the bottom of the scale to find out. Guess what I discovered?"

Cassim watched Vashti draw a gold coin from her pocket and immediately snatched it from her hand, holding it up in the flickering candlelight. "My brother is up to something, this much is sure. How did a woodcutter acquire such quality gold?"

"There must be more," Vashti spat haughtily. "Think about it—you only count your money, but he has so much that he has to weigh it. Find out where the rest of the gold is hidden."

The next morning while Fatima was at the marketplace, Cassim pushed open the door to Ali's shack. Grabbing his brother by his tunic, Cassim roared, "Do not keep secrets from your brother!" He threw the gold coin at Ali's face and spoke condescendingly. "I know all about your gold—you can blame your foolish wife."

Beside himself, Ali started talking until Cassim interrupted him, barking, "Take me there *now*."

Chapter 5

As Ali Baba and Cassim stood before the magic boulder in the forest, Cassim asked with disdain, “This is it? You expect me to believe that your precious gold came from within this old rock?”

Ali didn’t reply. Instead, he said, “Open, sesame” and watched his brother’s amazement as the door to the cave slid open. After the moment of shock had subsided, Cassim elbowed Ali aside and ran into the cave. Ali pondered gathering more riches, but with a shake of his head he began to head home.

Inside the cave, Cassim felt **euphoric** as he explored the treasures. He rolled around on the luxurious carpets and tossed handfuls of gold coins in the air. He draped himself in dazzling jewels and elaborate silk robes. Pulling out the bags he had brought, he filled them with loot. Once he was ready to leave, he paused and said, “What was that phrase again? Oh, yes, ‘Open, barley.’”

Nothing happened.

“I could have sworn those were the words Ali spoke to open the cave, or was it a different grain . . . or perhaps, it was a spice,” he wondered aloud. “Open, ginger,” he cried.

Again, nothing happened.



Growing frantic, he yelled, “Open, cinnamon! Open, paprika! Open, rice!” Still, nothing happened. Cassim panicked and clawed at the cave door like a caged tiger until his fingers started to bleed.

At dusk, the robbers returned to the cave to deposit newly gained riches, but a surprise greeted them—the desperate Cassim! The leader immediately put an end to him.

The robbers were greatly upset by Cassim’s presence in their secret cave. They wondered how he had learned about its location and the magic words required to enter it, but most disturbing was that others might now know about it, too. As a warning to potential looters, they left Cassim’s body inside the cave atop the riches.

Chapter 6

That same evening, Fatima and Ali Baba ate dinner together. Although they had exchanged some harsh words, they soon realized that Cassim had intentionally caused Ali to doubt Fatima.

Vashti burst through the door, looking distressed. "Is Cassim here?" she asked.

Ali and Fatima exchanged perceptive glances. "No," Ali answered. "I last saw him in the forest."

Vashti implored him, "Go back there."

Ali knew that Vashti was more concerned about the treasures Cassim was to bring than Cassim himself, but Ali was still loyal to his family. He set out for the forest.

The moon was high when Ali returned home. Vashti looked up from her tea. "Have you found him?" she probed, her voice fraught with emotion.

Ali replied in a near whisper, "Vashti, it is with regret that I must tell you he has departed for the next world."

Ali took the distraught Vashti home, where her dedicated maid, Morgiana, awaited. Once Morgiana put Vashti to bed, she brought Ali a cup of tea with her **condolences**.

"Thank you," Ali said. They sat in silence for a moment before Ali spoke again. "My brother and Vashti trust your **candor**, and so I must, too." With that, he told her the entire story of the treasure and Cassim's death. Morgiana quickly realized the predicament that Ali, Fatima, and Vashti were in—and she also saw an opportunity.

"I will help you," Morgiana said when he finished, "but my aid is not complimentary. Reward me so that I may go back to my homeland and live life with little worry. Agreed?"

Ali quickly **acquiesced**, and Morgiana suggested it would be prudent to make Cassim's fate appear accidental.

The following day, Morgiana went to the marketplace to spread the news that a donkey had kicked Cassim in the head and he had died.

The next evening, the robbers returned to their cave and were perplexed to find Cassim's body missing. **Incensed**, the leader cried, "Now we can be certain that someone else knows about the cave." Fury clouded his eyes as he pointed at one of the men and ordered, "You, go into town tomorrow morning. Find out the identity of the man we killed yesterday. We must learn who his **accomplice** is."

Chapter 7

The next day, the robber, pretending to be a holy man, surfaced in town, offering his condolences to bereaved families. In the marketplace, he inquired about the names of families who had recently suffered the loss of a loved one. Dismissing the deaths of unlikely people, he focused on the death of one man named Cassim.

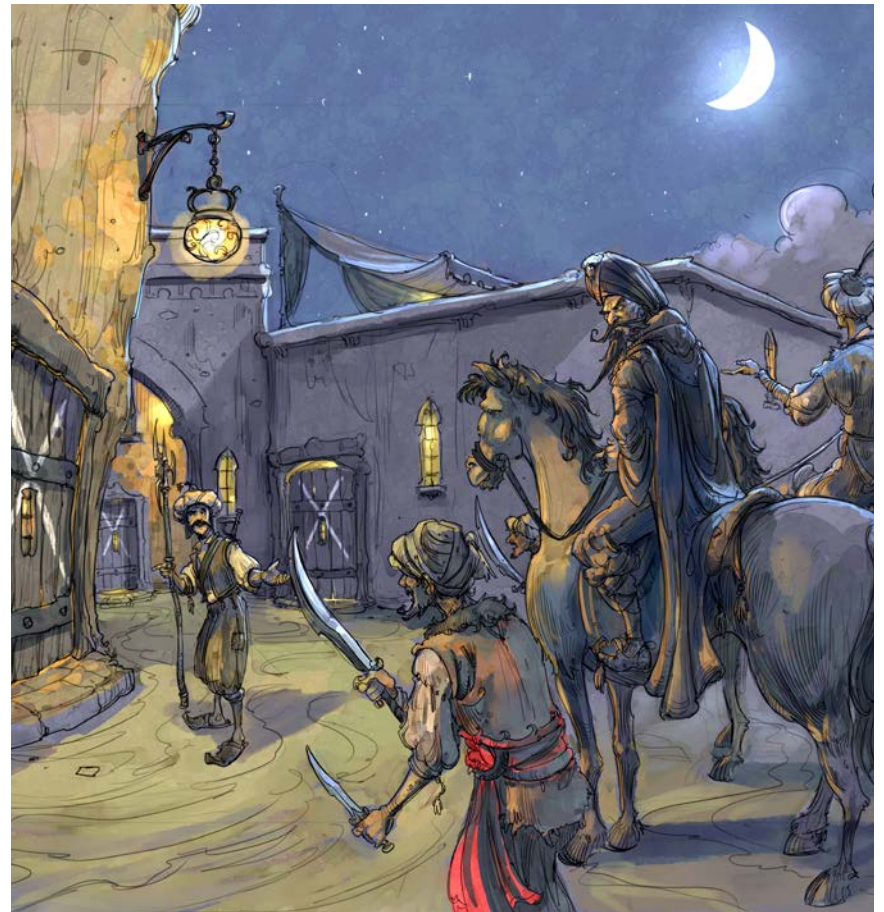
Vashti was in mourning and was not accepting any visitors, but Morgiana permitted the holy man inside the mansion to say a prayer over Cassim's body. The robber immediately recognized Cassim, and in his excitement (paying no mind to the female servant watching him) said a few quick words before standing to leave.

Morgiana had seen much of the world, and this dirge seemed strange to her. Also, the man had an **unscrupulous** air about him. After escorting him back to the front door, Morgiana peered from behind a curtain as the robber used chalk to draw a giant X on the mansion's front door.

Morgiana sighed and shook her head. *Simple tricks for simple men*, she thought as she searched for a piece of chalk. Locating one in a small drawer, she ran outside and drew an X on each of the houses on the street.

That night, the **spurious** holy man led the group to Cassim's street. He abruptly stopped in his tracks. Now all the front doors had an X, and they looked increasingly similar to one another. Which house had he been to earlier?

Frustrated, the leader declared that he would have to figure out another way to ascertain the identity of the dead man's conspirator.



Chapter 8

The next day, the leader of the thieves posed as an oil merchant, and the robber who had posed as the holy man was disguised as his helper. They spent the day knocking on the doors of all the houses on Cassim's street. When Morgiana answered the door to Cassim's home, the robber subtly nudged the leader, who asked, "May I see the master of the house?"

Morgiana said, "My master's wife is in mourning and isn't accepting any visitors."

Ali Baba came to the door. "I am the brother of Cassim. How can I help you?"

"I have oil for sale," the merchant gestured to the many barrels loaded on carts in the street. Morgiana looked at the barrels. Something about them and these men made her feel unsettled.

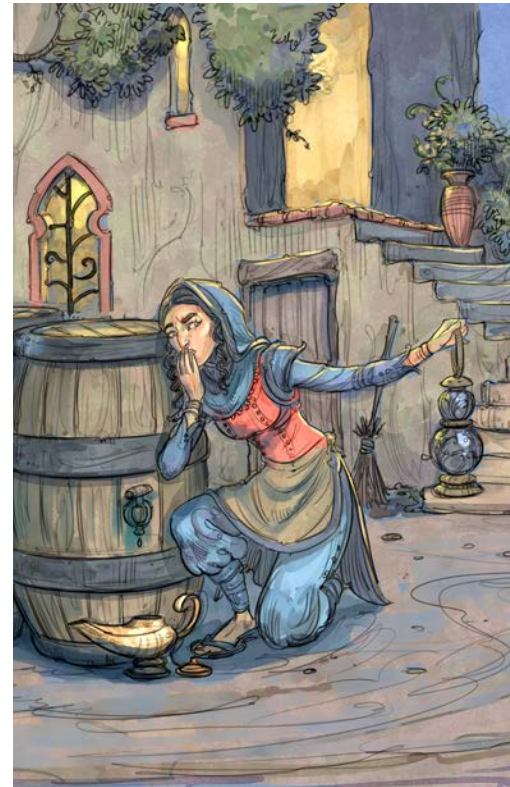
"Yes, we will take a few barrels," Ali said.

"Thank you, kind sir. May we also stay here tonight and store our wares in your yard?" the leader inquired.

Ali, feeling bound by the rules of hospitality and interested in the stories of an oil merchant, ignored Morgiana's concerned expression as he replied, "You may stay here, my friend."

Chapter 9

As Morgiana prepared dinner that night, her lantern went out. "Good thing Ali Baba purchased some oil," she remarked to herself.



She went out to the yard and chose a barrel from which to get oil. She turned the spigot. No oil. She tried the next barrel and was pleased to find oil. As she finished filling her lantern, she heard something move inside one of the barrels. Then she heard a grunt and a muffled cough.

Fear crept up Morgiana's spine as she headed back into the house, where she nearly collided with the oil merchant's assistant. In the moment of surprise, the assistant forgot to cover his face, and Morgiana instantly recognized him as the holy man from the day before.

The thieves' plan materialized in Morgiana's mind like puzzle pieces falling into place. She realized why she had intuitively felt uneasy earlier. She smiled tactfully and apologized for her clumsiness before leading the man to the dining room, where Ali Baba entertained the oil merchant. Her repeated attempts to pull Ali Baba from the room were met with dismissive gestures, as he was enraptured with the merchant's exciting tales.

Exasperated at Ali Baba's foolishness and suppressing an urge to chide him, Morgiana left the room and gathered all the servants. She informed them about the robbers hiding in the barrels and instructed them to find all the glue they could, ordering them to reconvene in the yard. There, they silently glued the barrels closed and then, one by one, rolled the barrels out of the yard and down the hill to where the city soldiers stood guard.

Morgiana addressed the captain of the soldiers, explaining, "There is a thief posing as an oil merchant at my master's house. He schemes to release his men from these barrels and rob and murder us tonight."



The soldiers laughed at this outrageous tale at first, but then they broke open one of the barrels to find a confused, and dizzy, robber armed to the teeth. As one group of soldiers set about opening the barrels and arresting the woozy robbers, Morgiana guided the captain and his men to the mansion.

Chapter 10

The thieves were tried and sent to faraway prisons, where their stories of a magical cave filled with plunder were treated as imaginative fairy tales.

As promised, Ali Baba gave Morgiana ample gold to return to her homeland and live the rest of her days comfortably. Vashti begged her to stay, promising her more riches and even the secret of the cave's locale if she would continue as Vashti's servant. Morgiana politely declined the offer and left. Being a shrewd woman, she used the gold to establish a trading business that kept her family affluent for generations to come.

Ali Baba, Fatima, and Vashti returned to the cave often. They passed its secrets on to their children, who lived satisfactorily with what remained of the treasure.

By the time Ali Baba, Fatima, and Vashti's great-grandchildren were born, inevitably there was no treasure left. One enterprising great-grandchild made some money by showing people the wondrous moving rock, but the novelty soon wore off. He spent the rest of his days living in the empty cave. After he expired, no one remembered the magic words, and the rock never moved again.

Glossary

accomplice (<i>n.</i>)	someone who helps another person to do something wrong or illegal (p. 12)
acquiesced (<i>v.</i>)	accepted or gave in without an argument (p. 12)
candor (<i>n.</i>)	honesty or openness (p. 12)
condolences (<i>n.</i>)	expressions of sympathy or comfort, especially after the death of a loved one (p. 11)
destitute (<i>adj.</i>)	very poor or lacking resources such as food, shelter, or clothing (p. 7)
euphoric (<i>adj.</i>)	extremely happy or excited (p. 9)
flabbergasted (<i>adj.</i>)	utterly astonished or amazed (p. 6)
incensed (<i>adj.</i>)	extremely angry (p. 12)
prosperous (<i>adj.</i>)	having success; well-off (p. 4)
spurious (<i>adj.</i>)	fake or deceitful (p. 14)
suet (<i>n.</i>)	a hard fat around the kidneys of some animals that can be used in cooking or in making products such as soap (p. 7)
unscrupulous (<i>adj.</i>)	dishonest or showing a lack of moral principles (p. 13)