

Mercury and the Woodcutter

Before Reading

Motivation / Purpose

The purpose of this text is to entertain the reader with a fable about honesty. Mercury the river god rescues a woodcutter's axe from a river. He rewards the woodcutter's honesty with two more axes.

Text Type

Draw students' attention to the:

- title
- illustrations
- contents page.

Ask, "What type of book is this?" (Narrative)

Visual Literacy

Discuss the front cover. Where and when do you think this story is set? What visual clues lead you to these ideas?

Note the colour and font styles for this story. What do the colours and shapes suggest? Why do you think these colours and font styles were used?

Background Knowledge

Read 'Based on a fable by Aesop'. What is a fable? Tell students that fables are stories with a moral or message. What clues does this give you about this narrative?

Discuss who Aesop was and how he came to write fables.

Phonological Awareness

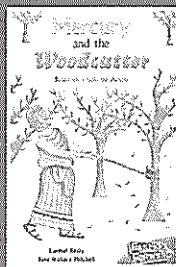
Make sure students know these phonological patterns:

- -or: thought (p.4), water (p.10)
- short e: head (p.4), friend (p.18)
- -er: Mercury (p.13), third (p.15)

Find words in the text containing these sounds. Make two flash cards for each word. Underline the letters representing the sounds. Place the cards face down. Have students turn over two cards at a time. If the two words have the same sound, the player keeps the cards. If the words contain different sounds, the play moves to the next person. The winner is the player with the most pairs.

Vocabulary

axe, dishonest, firewood, golden, handle, honest, Mercury, riverbank, silver, slid, strength, woodcutter, wooden



Write th____t. Ask students to fill in the missing letters to make the /or/ sound in 'thought'. Repeat with other words from the list above.

High Frequency Words

angrily, beautiful, chopped, ground, lucky, near, rest, sharp, sobbed, splash, stared, wiped, wonderful

Analyse each word. What base words have suffixes added to them? (wiped, wonderful, lucky) What base words can have suffixes added to them to make new words? (near, ground, sharp, splash, rest)

Write the base words of each word in the list. Make suffix sums, e.g. chop + s = chops; chop + ed = chopped. How does the base word change when suffixes are added?

During Reading

Vocabulary in Context

Say a key adjective or adverb from the story. Ask students to give an antonym or word with the opposite meaning. (e.g. beautiful - ugly; sharp - blunt; strong - weak)

Which adjectives can be made into antonyms by adding a prefix meaning 'not'? (e.g. lucky - unlucky; honest - dishonest; appeared - disappeared)

List other words that can be made into antonyms by adding a prefix meaning 'not'. (e.g. happy - unhappy; usual - unusual; agree - disagree)

Checking for Meaning

Literal:

How does Mercury reward the woodcutter for his honesty? (p.16)

What does Mercury do when the second woodcutter lies about losing his axe? (p.22)

Inferential:

Why do you think the woodcutter's friend pretends that his axe is lost in the water?

What is the message of this fable?

Make sure students understand the difference between literal and inferential information.

Response:

Is this an old story or a new story?

What connection can you make between this fable and real life today?

What other social values could be communicated through stories? (e.g. sharing, caring for others, taking responsibility)

Grammatical Patterns

Make sure students understand the following components of a narrative:

- Orientation: introduces the main characters and the setting. The woodcutter has a beautiful wooden axe. He goes into the woods to cut firewood. (pp.4-6)
- Complication: the sequence of events develops a problem for the main character. The woodcutter's axe slips into the water. Mercury rescues his axe and rewards him with a golden and a silver axe. A second woodcutter pretends his axe has fallen into the water. (pp.7-20)
- Resolution: The problem is resolved. Mercury punishes the second woodcutter for his dishonesty. (pp.21-24)
- Use of nouns referring to the characters and things the story is about: *woodcutter* (p.4), *axe* (p.4), *strength* (p.4), *Mercury* (p.11), *honesty* (p.16)
- Use of adjectives to describe nouns and build noun groups: *a very good axe* (p.4), *a strong, sharp head* (p.4), *the river god* (p.11), *a golden axe* (p.12)
- Use of adverbial words and phrases of time, manner and place to build story information: *After he chopped down the tree* (p.7), *suddenly* (p.9), *with a splash* (p.9), *into the water* (p.14), *angrily* (p.22)
- Use of action verbs and verb groups describing actions: *set off* (p.4), *started to slip* (p.9), *dropped* (p.10)
- Use of saying and thinking verbs and phrases: *sobbed* (p.10), *asked* (p.13), *he told the second woodcutter* (p.20)

Fluency / Punctuation Patterns

Noun groups build descriptions. Model reading articles, adjectives and nouns as a group of words for fluency: *a beautiful wooden handle* (p.4), *a strong, sharp head* (p.4), *the deep water* (p.10), *a golden axe* (p.12), *the third time* (p.15), *the golden and silver axes* (p.16).

These punctuation patterns occur in the text:

- Exclamation marks indicate emotion and tone of voice in speech: *"Thank you! Thank you!"* (p.16) *"Yes, that's my axe!" he said.* (p.21)

- A comma is used in place of a full stop in direct speech: *"I will look again," said Mercury.* (p.14)
- The comma is removed in direct speech when an exclamation mark or question mark is used: *"What will I do?" he sobbed.* (p.10) *"Thank you!" he said.* (p.16)
- Commas separate connectives, clauses and phrases in increasingly complex sentences: *As soon as the woodcutter had gone, the friend, who was also a woodcutter, grabbed his own axe, and took off for the river.* (p.19)

Critical Literacy

Who is telling the story - one of the characters or a narrator? Identify the pronouns that indicate the story is told in the third person: *he, his, him*. If the woodcutter were telling the story, how would the sentences change?

Linking Visual and Written

How does the illustration style suit the story?

What modern-day situation could be used in a story to communicate the value of honesty?

How might the style of illustrations change if the story was set in the present time?

What story elements could be changed to set the story in the present time? (e.g. the characters, the axe) What story elements would stay the same?

After Reading

Have the students draw the characters and setting for a modern-day version of *Mercury and the Woodcutter*. As an extension, have them write a story outline using their ideas.

Activities

Students will:

- change incorrect words in a retelling of the story
- add suffixes to base words to fill the gaps in sentences
- find and record words containing a particular sound
- select and write adjectives and adverbs to complete sentences about the story.

Comprehension (meaning) Vocabulary (structure) Phonics (visual) Writing (structure)

