

The Slave and the Lion

A Slave ran away from his master, by whom he had been most cruelly treated, and, in order to avoid capture, betook himself into the desert. As he wandered about in search of food and shelter, he came to a cave, which he entered and found to be unoccupied. Really, however, it was a Lion's den, and almost immediately, to the horror of the wretched fugitive, the Lion appeared. The man gave himself up for lost. But, to his utter astonishment, the Lion, instead of springing upon him and devouring him, came and fawned upon him, at the same time whining and lifting up his paw. Observing it to be much swollen and inflamed, the Slave examined it and found a large thorn embedded in the ball of the foot. He accordingly removed it and dressed the wound as well as he could: and in the course of time it healed up completely. The Lion's gratitude was unbounded: he looked upon the Slave as his friend, and they shared the cave for some time together. A day came, however, when the Slave began to long for the society of his fellow men and he bade farewell to the Lion and returned to the town. Here he was presently recognised and carried off in chains to his former master, who resolved to make an example of him, and ordered that he should be thrown to the beasts at the next public spectacle in the theatre. On the fatal day the beasts were loosed into the arena, and among the rest a Lion of huge bulk and ferocious aspect: and then the wretched Slave was cast in among them. What was the amazement of the spectators, when the Lion after one glance bounded up to him and lay down at his feet with every expression of affection and delight! It was his old friend from the cave! The audience clamoured that the Slave's life should be spared: and the governor of the town, marvelling at such gratitude and fidelity in a beast, decreed that both should receive their liberty.

Alternative versions

- a) The Slave escapes, finds the cave, meets the Lion, removes the thorn and lives happily ever after in the cave with him.
- b) The Slave escapes and meets the Lion, as in the original, but, upon returning to town his master tells him how much he's missed him and promises to be much kinder in future.
- c) Everything happens exactly as in the original except that the Lion kills the Slave in the arena.

The substitutions and deletions can be excellent exercises to prime students for subsequent analytical work. The three alternative versions of the story and the questions about them should lead to some fruitful discussion about the nature of narrative and resolution.

This simple exercise should produce immediate focus on specific elements of the story which generate interest and create empathy, tension and surprise

elements which, in short, make it a story rather than a sequence of random events with no sense of resolution. Alternative version (a) produces a 'so what?' effect – it's possible that there could be a story about a man living with a lion, but there is nothing here to develop that. It also deprives us of a confrontation between the Slave and his master and enables us to realise that this story revolves around that particular conflict. Version (b) offers us more information, more events, but there is no causal connection between the Slave's good deed for the Lion and his subsequent better treatment by his master, so what's the point of it? In addition, it reveals how the original version creates more jeopardy and sustains tension. Version (c) reads a bit like a joke, but even as a comic reversal of expectations it's unsatisfying because, surely, the Lion is acting 'out of character' – his previous relationship with the slave makes this action unmotivated and implausible.

Despite its simplicity, this exercise should produce some valuable responses and insights which should be articulated and recorded; lack of character motivation, randomness of events and lack of narrative development are all common problems with students' work and this can be a useful reference point in the future.

● Activity 2

Following Activity 1, students could work in small groups in order to consider questions which focus on the nature of the main character in the story, the way in which the story is built around his 'journey' and the significant moments in the story which cause other things to happen. Subsequent discussion could evolve along the following lines:

- 1 The Slave is the main character because:
 - We see things from his point of view and, therefore, identify most with him;
 - He is 'on screen' most of the time;
 - He initiates the action and drives the plot;
 - The story describes his journey.

These points together can usefully define the term **protagonist** (the terms 'hero' or 'heroine' are often used instead, but students may assume that a 'hero' must be 'heroic'. The term 'protagonist' sidesteps this issue.)

- 2 At the beginning the Slave is a fugitive on the run. At the end he is a legitimately free man. He has travelled a path and achieved his ultimate goal as a direct result of his actions.
- 3 The Slave's goals vary.
 - Initially he wants to escape from his cruel master.
 - In the cave he wants to survive his encounter with the Lion.

- Then he wants to help the lion.
- Later he wants to return to human company.
- Subsequently he wants to survive his ordeal in the arena.

There is an opportunity here to highlight those moments at which a goal changes or is reached and nominate them as turning points, reversals, or

Plot Points.

- 4 The story feels finished because the protagonist has attained his ultimate goal. That goal has been achieved as a direct result of his actions. Although the Slave's fictional 'life' could continue, our interest in it ceases at the point at which he wins his freedom.
- 5 The question of theme or controlling idea can generate some useful discussion. It clearly operates around the poles of 'cruelty' and 'kindness' and also 'humanity' and 'beastliness'. The slave has been treated cruelly and runs away. Later, despite being fearful, he is kind to a beast. Upon his return, humans consign him to a cruel fate, but the beast repays his kindness with kindness of its own. Finally, marvelling at this display of 'humanity', the governor rewards both beast and man with freedom – in other words the beast teaches men how to be kind. Even if a formulation such as 'kindness will be repaid' seems a bit reductive, it should be clear that there is a high degree of thematic unity in this story which holds the action together and which conveys a moral message.

It can also be suggested that this unity and sense of balance deters us from questioning the coincidence upon which the resolution depends – it is clearly a contrivance which serves the story, but our pleasure in seeing the different strands come together in order to bring about the resolution makes it unlikely that we will question the 'reality' of the tale. Once again, this can be a useful reference point later when students attempt to pin their own work to some kind of controlling idea.

Worksheet 4 – Analysing *Friends*

A predictive exercise can help to develop and extend what has been learned in relation to the fable. Again, an example has been chosen which is short enough to be manageable in its entirety. It is also a very different kind of text, which has two advantages: it introduces variety and it also demonstrates that structural similarities can be identified in different forms from different periods.

The example below is from *Friends* (Season 2, Episode 21 – 'The one with the bullies'). Like many recent US sitcoms it exemplifies a highly condensed