

CHARACTER BUILDING LESSONS

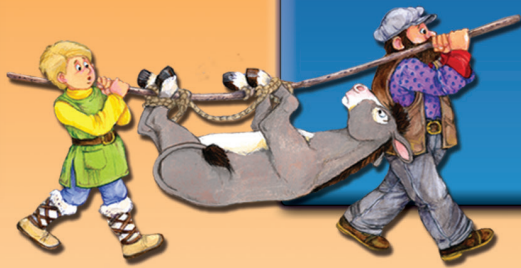
SOMMER-TIME STORIES

THE MILLER, HIS SON, AND THEIR DONKEY

Story Description

The miller Elmo and his son Mort have a problem—instead of standing up for what they know is right, they follow everyone else’s opinions. When a farmer complains that Elmo is overworking the donkey, Elmo and Mort mill the grain. When others complain that his prices are too high, Elmo reduces the price, even if he’s losing money. When a friend suggests Mort steal apples with him, Mort goes along with the plan.

Their trouble worsens when they take their donkey to sell at the market and listen to all the advice they hear along the way. By trying to please everyone, they end up pleasing no one and losing their donkey. This retelling of Aesop’s classic fable illustrates that the path to success means standing up for what is right.



Main Character Traits

Responsibility/Assertiveness/Courage

Other Character Traits

Honesty, Listening, Obedience to Parents, Proper Work Ethic, Respect for Others, and Trustworthiness

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Proper Work Ethic

One day a farmer watched Elmo mill the grain with his donkey. “You’re working the donkey much too hard,” the farmer complained. “Give the donkey some rest.”

Elmo quickly loosed the donkey. “Mort,” called Elmo, “We’re going to mill the grain.”

“Why should we mill the grain?” asked Mort. “It’s hard work pushing the stone.”

“I know it is,” groaned Elmo.

Elmo is a hard worker; he doesn’t mind the hard work of milling the grain. Working hard helps you be successful.

Assertiveness and Courage

Elmo told Mort, “The farmer was upset because he thought the donkey needed rest, so I listened to him.” Whenever farmers complained, Elmo always did what they told him, whether it was right or wrong.

Heddy came to the mill and asked, “What are you doing?”

“A farmer complained that the donkey was working too hard,” Elmo explained. “So we’re milling the grain ourselves.”

Heddy said, “Elmo, you’re not working that donkey too hard. Donkeys are very strong. Your problem is that you’re always listening to others, even when they’re wrong. That’s why we’re so poor.”

“But I don’t want to upset the farmers.”

“You must learn to think for yourself and stand up for what is right.”

Elmo hung his head and mumbled, “I know I should.”

Just like his father, Mort also did what others told him. One day his friend Sid said, “Let’s steal some apples.”

“Okay,” said Mort.

Both Elmo and Mort listened to others instead of asserting themselves and standing up for what was right. It takes courage, but it is important to assert yourself and stand against doing wrong things. It will keep you out of trouble and help you do well in life.

Honesty and Trustworthiness

When Sid and Mort had filled their pockets with apples, Sid whispered, “Let’s go.”

Mort jumped on the fence, and the fence broke. “CRACK!”

“Shhhhh!” whispered Sid. “Didn’t I tell you not to make any noise?”

By the time Mort got home, the farmer had told his mom what had happened. “Why did you steal the apples?” Mom demanded.

Mort lowered his head and whispered, “Sid asked me to go with him to pick apples, so I went with him.”

Sid and Mort were whispering because they didn’t want to get caught stealing apples. Then Mort lied to his mother about why he went with Sid. Now Mort has created a reputation for himself as a thief and a liar. What you do and say creates your reputation. What is your reputation? If you need to, how can you change it?

Listening and Obedience to Parents

Heddy said, "Look at me! Stealing is wrong! You need to stand up for what is right."

"Didn't you say I should listen to advice?" Mort asked.

"I told you to listen to good advice, not bad advice. Now go tell the farmer you're sorry, pay for the apples, and fix the fence!"

"Okay," whispered Mort.

Mort had not listened or obeyed his mother. He knew that he should only listen to good advice, not bad. He was trying to find an excuse for what he had done. Always listen to and obey your parents and teachers; their advice will help you do right and keep you out of trouble.

Assertiveness

When some girls saw Elmo and Mort walking the donkey, they began laughing at them. "Ha, ha, ha. That man and boy are so foolish to both be walking. One of them should ride that strong donkey."

"We should listen to those girls," Elmo said. "We don't want to look foolish. One of us needs to ride the donkey. Mort, why don't you ride him?" Mort climbed onto the donkey.

As they walked they met some old men and women. "What are you doing?" asked one of the old men. "You're spoiling your son by not making him walk."

...Elmo said, "We need to listen to that old man." Mort climbed off the donkey and Elmo got on. As they walked, they met some mothers with their children. "What a shame!" a mother yelled. "That selfish, lazy man rides the donkey while he makes his poor son walk!"

"We should listen to those angry mothers," said Elmo. "Let's both ride the donkey."

As they rode the donkey, they passed some store owners. A store owner said, "You're wearing out the donkey with both of you riding it. Look at him. He's hot and tired, and he's dragging his feet."

Another store owner said, "No one will buy a donkey looking like that. You should carry the donkey if you want to sell him. The donkey needs to look good if you want to get a good price."

...A store owner gave them a long pole. As they were tying the legs of the donkey onto the pole, Elmo said, "I'm so glad for the store owners' advice. Now the donkey will look good when we sell him. We should get lots of money for him. Mom will be so glad."

Each time someone told Elmo what to do, he did it without even thinking about whether it was wise advice or not. Always think about what someone tells you to do and decide if it is a good idea to follow their advice or if you should do something else.

Respect for Others

To reach the market, Elmo and Mort had to cross a bridge. When the donkey heard the loud noise of the river, he became frightened. He gave a big kick and fell off the pole. He then ran and jumped over the side of the bridge into the river and drowned. "Ohhhhh!" groaned Elmo. "We worked so hard, and now we've lost our

donkey.”

As they walked home, Elmo groaned over and over again, “Ohhhhh! How foolish we were for always listening to others. By trying to please everyone, we pleased no one. We need to stand up for what we know is right.”

“I agree,” Mort said. From that day on, Elmo and Mort always did what they knew was right.

Elmo and Mort forgot to show respect to Heddy by doing what was right, and it caused them to lose the donkey. You should always respect the desires of your family before trying to please others.

Questions

1. At the beginning of the story, why did Elmo and Mort unhitch the donkey and mill the grain themselves?
A farmer said that they needed to let the donkey rest because they were working him too hard, and Elmo didn't want to upset the farmer.
2. What did Elmo's wife, Heddy, say about working the donkey?
She said that donkeys are strong and that Elmo was not working it too hard.
3. Why was Elmo's family poor?
He was always listening to what others told him instead of doing what he knew was right.
4. Why did Mort go with Sid to steal apples?
He always did what his friends told him to do just like his father.
5. What did the farmer who owned the apples say he would do when he saw Sid and Mort stealing apples?
He said he would tell their parents.
6. What would the farmer have done if Sid and Mort had asked for some apples?
He would have given them some.
7. What did Mort's mother say when he arrived home?
She said that stealing is wrong, and he must go apologize to the farmer, pay for the apples, and fix the fence.
8. Why did Heddy want Elmo and Mort to take the young donkey to the market?
They did not need two donkeys, but needed the money that selling one would bring.
9. Before taking the donkey to the market, what did they do?
They did not have the donkey mill any grain, but let it rest so that it would be in excellent shape to sell.
10. When Elmo and Mort started off to the market, what was Heddy's advice?
She said not to ride the donkey, so that it would not be worn out when they got to

the market.

11. Why did Mort start riding the donkey?
Some girls were making fun of them for having a donkey that no one was riding.
12. Why did Elmo get on the donkey and have Mort get off?
Some old men and women said that he was spoiling Mort. They said that Mort would not learn how to work and would grow up to be lazy and no good.
13. Why did Elmo have Mort get on the donkey with him?
Some mothers with their children said that Elmo was a lazy man who rode in comfort while his son had to walk on the road.
14. Why did Elmo and Mort both get off the donkey and carry him instead?
Some store owners said that they were wearing the donkey out and that to get a good price at the market he would need to be carried.
15. How did Elmo and Mort carry the donkey?
They tied him to a long pole.
16. When people saw them carrying the donkey on the pole, what did they do?
They laughed at such a strange sight.
17. What made the donkey come off the pole?
When they went over a bridge, the raging river frightened the donkey, and it kicked and got loose.
18. What happened to the donkey then?
It went over the bridge into the river and drowned.
19. How do you think Elmo and Mort felt when they lost the donkey? Why did they feel that way?
They were probably sad that they would not get the money for the donkey and mad at themselves for letting it happen. They knew that they needed the money and that Heddy would be upset at them. (inference)
20. How do you think Heddy felt when she found out what happened?
She was probably disappointed and upset at Elmo and Mort for losing the donkey. (inference)
21. What lesson did Elmo and Mort learn?
They learned that they were foolish for listening to others. Elmo said, "By trying to please everyone, we pleased no one. We need to stand up for what we know is right."