

The Ant Who Taught a Kingdom to Prosper

A lesson in good work habits and saving

In an ancient kingdom, the Queen watched the children carefully. Some spent all their time playing and never wanted to do their chores or their homework. Others worked so hard that they rarely had time to play. As they grew into adults they seemed to keep the same habits, so many in her kingdom ended up not having much for their families. Those who worked harder had more for their families.

So the Queen called one her wise advisors and asked, “what can we do to teach the children good habits.”

The wise one listened. “Great Queen he replied, “we don’t have to create a separate subject, let’s let them learn from the animals and insects they see around them every day.”

The Queen was curious and asked how that could be done.

“Call all the children tonight and I will show you.”

And so that night after all the children had gathered in a large circle, the Wise One began:

“Once there was a grasshopper who loved to hop or fly across the fields. He could easily land on the head of each wheat stalk and eat the kernels, avoiding the beards grain from the wheat – and then fly to the next.

Once he was full, he would find a comfortable spot and start singing to attract his friends. You can imagine a grasshopper concert in every field – a real “hop-in.”

Summer days would pass and the Grasshopper would stuff himself, sit back and sing, but never put anything away for later.

Meanwhile, under his favorite spot, an ant was busily gathering the grain that would fall from the heads. As he returned to his colony, he would leave an invisible trail (a scent – smell – pheromone) so he could easily find his way back and so all his friends could go directly to the food while he was busy piling up the wheat underground in the colony storehouse. I’m sure you’ve seen lines of ants heading out to work or returning with some food.

The Grasshopper would look down from his comfortable perch and call to the ant “why are you working so hard – take a break and join us in some music.”

The ant replied, “There will be plenty of time to rest soon enough. And I’m not as big and fast as you anyway. I have to work harder just to keep up.”

And so it went, every time the ant passed, the Grasshopper would tease him and try to distract him from his work. But the ant just ignored him.”

The wise man could see that the children were enjoying the story. He looked around and asked, “Which of you are like the ants?” Quietly, bashfully, a few of the children raised their hands. “And which are like the grasshopper?” The rest laughed and raised their hands. “All right, hold your laughter, let me finish the story.”

Everyday followed the same routine, until one day, the farmers came to harvest their crop. The field was full of women (and men) swinging long wooden handles with a steel blade called scythes to cut the grain or bending low with sharp blades called sickles. This was called reaping. After a full days work, the fields were bare and the next day they had to thresh it or separate the grain from the stems. often by beating it on the ground, and finally winnowing – holding the grain up in the air in a special basket so the wind could blow away and chaff or bugs left.

It only took a day and the fields were bare. The ants his underground in their colony – closing the doors. They had stored enough grain to last them all winter. But the grasshoppers had no place to go.

So now the grasshopper was singing a different tune. “I’m starving please help.” But unfortunately, the ants had already closed their store houses for the winter and stayed inside.

So the grasshopper who was so sure of himself slowly starved.

The children were greatly stunned. The Wise man spoke again – “Now who wants to be a grasshopper?” – no one raised their hands. “And what about an ant? Everyone, even the ones who had laughed and teased the “ants” the most had to raise their hands.

From that day on, the children changed their habits and everyone in the kingdom prospered. Everyone did their share, even the littlest one, no matter how small contributed to everyone’s benefit.

And naturally the Queen was so happy that she asked the Wise One what he would want. Your majesty, I am happiest when your problems are solved and the Kingdom is happy. After all being wise means that we are content with the benefit of others.

Thoughts

AND so my fellow travelers, that is how the lowly ant was able to make a whole kingdom wealthy. Remember it’s not the show that counts, it’s the effort that goes into our daily work.

Background

This is found most commonly in Aesop’s fables, but also in African and Asian stories the Ant is considered the most industrious and used to teach not only hard work but team work.

Essential Question

Why is it important to work as hard as you can, do the best you can?

How can we learn from observing nature??

Farm notes -

If this had happened today, it would be a different story. The ground would shake and a deafening noise would sound as the farmer drove his combine into the fields. Like a giant vacuum, the front rotating blades would cut the wheat – suck the whole plant into its ‘mouth’ – saving the kernels in a grain hopper, and then spitting out the stems or chaff behind. For people, this new invention was a real time saving benefit. BUT for the grasshoppers and even the ants it was a real problem. Some places in the world still harvest by hand as in the story.

Social Studies - IF ONLY this was always true – often those who work hard with their hands, laborers, do not get as much as those who have more money, more power, or those who have a better education. BUT what is true, is whatever task we are given, we will be recognized for the honest labor we put in. The problem is that when we see others get ahead by cheating or taking advantage of those who aren't as talented – we feel stupid that we are working hard while those who cheat, seem to succeed. This undermines the whole of society. This is why there are rules in games – and that cheating is not allowed. We saw in the Olympics that whole teams of players took drugs to make them stronger. They took away medals from those who broke the rules, or even accidentally stepped out of bounds in a race.

EXCEPT for the really rare birds who succeed without any effort – it seems to come to them naturally – it is still your accumulated effort.

In the old world, some people believe that your hard work and good deeds carry over from a previous life and will carry forward to your next. That's how they explain that some people are born w a silver spoon, while others are poor, why some are born w amazing talents in music, sports, or studies. They are just picking up where they left off.

Interesting Science facts

Kernel

- The kernel is the seed of the wheat plant and is housed in the head (or spike, when speaking of an immature plant). The kernel, or wheatberry, is composed of three parts: the endosperm (soluble fiber), the bran (insoluble fiber) and the germ (the sprouting section of the seed). The bulk of the kernel is the endosperm, the main source of white flour.

Beard

- The bristly material that protects the wheat kernel is called the beard. Not all wheat grasses have this; those that don't are called awnless. The benefits of not having wheat beards are twofold. Inclement weather does not prove as damaging to growing crops, as awnless varieties are less dusty. Awnless wheat is easier for livestock to graze on as well. Today, both awned and awnless wheats are frequently dried and used in cut flower arrangements.

Stem

- Like most plants, wheat grasses have stems that support the head of the plant. These stems are hollow and become straw after the kernel is harvested. Some farmers grow wheat for straw production only. Straw is used as mulch (frequently for strawberries), animal bedding and feed, and decoration (in straw bales at Halloween, for instance).

Grasshopper facts

- One swarm in 1988 covered an area of 75 x 15 miles, contained (about) 150 billion locusts and was estimated to be eating 300,000 tons fresh green food per day.
- A more attractive feature of some grasshoppers is their ability to sing. It's the males that sing, and they do it to attract female mates, or to warn off other males.
- There are thought to be between 11,000 and 18,000 different species of grasshoppers.
- One of the strangest grasshopper facts is that they do not have a nose with which to breathe. Instead, they have holes all along the sides of their bodies for breathing.
- Grasshoppers are unique among insects in that they sing. While their song sounds kind of like a chirp, different species make the noise in different ways.
- A large grasshoppers can jump a distance of about 20 times the length of its body.