



The Monkey King teacher's notes

The Monkey King: a Jataka tale

Background Information

About five hundred Jataka tales can be found in the Buddhist Pali and Sanskrit texts. The word Jataka (pronounced Jah-ta-ka) means birth, and these stories are traditionally said to be accounts of the past lives of the Buddha as he pursued the path to Enlightenment. Buddhists would not necessarily take the stories as being literally true. They would look for a deeper meaning in them. In the texts, the Buddha is often depicted as telling a Jataka tale to illustrate a point or clear up a misunderstanding. All the Jataka tales demonstrate the central Buddhist teaching of the Law of Karma: that actions have consequences. Selfish actions lead to suffering and selfless actions lead to true happiness. The monkey king, perhaps one of the most famous of the Jatakas, is a story of heroic self-sacrifice. The original text states that the monkey king was the Buddha in a previous life.

Programme synopsis

Story

Some young monkeys find a mango tree. The monkeys, led by the monkey king, go to live in the tree. A mango falls from the tree into the river and floats downstream. The greedy king of Benares finds the mango and goes in search of the tree. When he realizes there are monkeys in the mango tree, he wants to kill them. The monkey king makes an escape bridge with his body, risking his own life to save others. From his example the selfish king learns about putting others first.

Themes

- Self-sacrifice—putting the needs of others before your own
- Learning from example
- Caring for others in the family/community

Recalling the story – The monkey king worksheet



The sequencing activity is designed to help the children recollect the main aspects of the story. The activity is graded for four levels of ability. Recall with the children the main points of the story - the pictures may be enlarged and used as support. The children may then:

- Cut and match the sentences to the pictures
- Order the sentences and copy them out to match the pictures



- Write their own sentence for each picture—use illustrated key words as support
- Free write the story—use the illustrations and key words as support

Explore and Respond

The aim is to help the children to improvise relevant sections of the story in order to explore their own feelings and those of the various characters.

The Monkey King makes a bridge:

- Imagine that you are one of the band of monkeys living harmoniously in the mango tree.
- Climb the tree. Explore. Eat and enjoy the mangoes. Sleep, play and carefully pick all the fruit that hangs out over the water.
- The human King and his soldiers arrive. Hide in the branches.
- You are very frightened. Try not to move or make a sound.
- You see the monkey king leap over the river and make himself into a bridge. (A rope may be laid on the floor to represent the bridge.)
- One at a time, quietly and carefully, you cross over to safety.

Discuss with the children how they felt:

- Living in the tree
- Hiding from the king
- When the monkey king made himself into a bridge
- When they escaped

Putting others first

- You are going on a picnic. Choose three of your favourite things to eat and pack them in a bag. What is each item? How does it look, feel, smell and taste? Imagine how nice it will be to eat it.
- You set off on the picnic and meet someone who is very hungry/thirsty. Open your bag and give them one of your items of food. Which one will you give away?
- You set off again and meet someone else who is in need of food. Open your bag and give them one of your items of food.
- You set off again and meet someone else who is badly in need of food. Open your bag.



- This time if you give your food away you will have nothing left for yourself. What do you do?

Discuss with the children:



- What food/drink they chose
- Their responses to the hungry people
- How it felt to give their food away
- How it felt to have nothing left

Discussion

Putting the needs of others before our own

The monkey king was very kind—and brave. He could have escaped; instead, he put the safety of the other monkeys first and made himself into a bridge. Putting someone else first goes beyond mere sharing or generosity. It can mean giving up something one wants for oneself in order to help another.

Discuss with the children:



- What would the little monkeys have been thinking when they realized that the human king wanted to kill them?
- What would the monkey king have been thinking when he realized the other monkeys were in danger?
- Why didn't the monkey king just save himself?
- What do you think it means to 'put someone else first'?
- Do you know anyone who puts other people first? Who are they? How do they put others first?
- In what ways can you put others first?
- Have you ever given away something you wanted for yourself?

Tell me about it:

- a) What did you give away?
- b) Was it easy to do?



- c) Why did you do it?
- d) How did you feel?
- e) What effect did it have on you/the other person?

Putting others first activity sheet



After the above discussion, the children:

- Draw the monkeys crossing over their king's back to safety.
- Write what the monkey king is thinking.
- Draw or write about how they put others first.