

PANCHATANTRA

The Panchatantra is an ancient collection of Indian animal fables. It is believed that it was first written around 200 B.C. to educate and entertain the children of the royal family. Each tale uses imagery to explain a moral or idea.

In literature, the theme is the main idea or moral of a story. Typically, the theme of a story conveys a message or lesson about life. The theme is generally not stated outright, but rather represented by the story's characters and their actions, as well as symbols and motifs throughout.

On a separate sheet of paper describe the theme of the story and how it relates to today.

The Gold-Giving Snake



In a certain place there lived a Brahman by the name of Haridatta. He tilled the soil, but his time in the field brought him no harvest. Then one day, as the hottest hours were just over, tormented by the heat, he lay down in the shade of a tree in the middle of his field for a sleep. He saw a frightful snake, decorated with a large hood, crawl from an anthill a little way off, and thought to himself, "This is surely the goddess of the field, and I have not once paid her homage. That is why the field remains barren. I must bring her an offering." After thus thinking it over, he got some milk, poured it into a basin, then went to the anthill, and said, "Oh, protector of this field, for a long time I did not know that you live here. For this reason I have not yet brought you an offering. Please forgive me!"

Having said this, he set forth the milk, and went home. The next day he returned to see what had happened, and he found a dinar (a coin) in the basin. And thus it continued day by day. He brought the snake milk, and always found a dinar there the next morning.

One day the Brahman asked his son to take the milk to the anthill, and he himself went into the village. The son brought the milk, set it there, and returned home. When he came back the next day and found a dinar, he said to himself, "This anthill must be full of gold dinars. I will kill the snake and take them all at once!"

Having decided this, the Brahman's son returned the next day with the milk and a club. As he gave the milk to the snake, he struck her on the head with the club. The snake, as fate willed it, escaped with her life. Filled with rage, she bit the boy with her sharp, poisoned teeth, and the boy fell dead at once. His people built a funeral pyre not far from the field and cremated him.

Two days later his father returned. When he discovered under what circumstances his son had died, he said that justice had prevailed. The next morning, he once again took milk, went to the anthill, and praised the snake with a loud voice. A good while later the snake appeared in the entrance to the anthill, and said, "You come here from greed, letting even your grief for your son pass by. From now on friendship between you and me will no longer be possible. Your son, in his youthful lack of understanding, struck me. I bit him. How can I forget the club's blow? How can you forget the pain and sorrow for your son?" After saying this she gave him a costly pearl for a pearl chain, said, "Do not come back," and disappeared into her cave.

The Brahman took the pearl, cursed his son's lack of understanding, and returned home.