

### **Grade 3: Unit 5, Week 1 Making Money**

#### **Read Aloud: The Moneylender and the Fly**

A Vietnamese Folk Tale retold by Polly Peterson

Wonderful Words: *possession, rascal, witness, debt, stern*

#### **The Moneylender and the Fly**

Everyone knew the rich man in the village. He had become rich by lending people money, and over the years, he had built a large fortune. He lived a life of ease and comfort in a big house surrounded by an immense garden, yet still he desired more. He continued to get richer by lending people money and charging very high rates.

One day the rich man set out for the home of a poor family that owed him money. He had reminded them often of the money they owed him, but no matter how hard they worked, they could never seem to make ends meet. They could not pay him back. On this day the rich man was determined to get his money, or he would take some of their possessions. He found no one at home, however, except a boy of eight or nine years old.

“Are your parents home, child?” asked the rich man.

“No,” the boy replied and went on playing with mud and sticks. He paid no attention to the rich man.

“Then where are they?” asked the rich man, becoming cross. The boy went on playing and did not answer.

The rich man angrily repeated his question. Finally the boy replied, “Well, sir, my father has gone to cut living trees and plant dead ones, and my mother has gone to the market to sell the wind and buy the moon.”

“What are you talking about?” asked the rich man. “Quick, tell me what you mean or you will know the meaning of this stick.” He held up his bamboo walking stick as if to strike the boy.

Repeated questioning, however, brought only the same reply. Finally the rich man said, “All right, you little rascal, listen to me! I came here to take the money your parents owe me, but if you tell me what you mean, I will forget all about it. They will no longer owe me anything.”

For the first time the boy looked interested. “Perhaps you are only teasing a poor boy, sir,” he said. “How can I know if you mean what you say?”

“Heaven and earth have heard my promise,” said the man pointing up at the sky and then down at the ground.

“Heaven and earth cannot talk, sir,” said the boy. “I want a living thing to be our witness.”

The rich man saw a fly landing on a bamboo pole nearby. Laughing inside to think of how he was fooling the boy, he proposed that the fly be their witness.

“The fly is a good enough witness for me,” said the boy. “Now here is the answer. My father has gone to cut bamboo. He will use it to make a fence for a man near the river. My mother. . . oh, sir, you will keep your promise, won’t you? You will free my parents of their debts?”

“Yes, yes, the fly is my witness,” promised the rich man. He urged the boy to go on.

“Well, my mother has gone to sell some fans so that she can buy oil for our lamp. Now wouldn’t you say that is selling the wind and buying the moon?”

The rich man had to admit to himself that the boy was clever. However, he was certainly foolish, too, for accepting the fly as a witness. Bidding the boy good-bye, the rich man said he would return soon to make good his promise.

A few days passed before the rich man came again. It was quite late in the evening when he found the boy's parents at home. He had no intention of keeping his promise, however; instead he tried to get money from the boy's parents. The boy woke up and heard the moneylender demanding payment and his father begging for more time. He cried out, "Father, Father, you do not need to pay. This gentleman promised me he would forget all about the money you owe him."

"Nonsense," said the rich man. "I never spoke a word with this boy. I insist that you pay up at once!"

The poor parents didn't know what to do. The boy seemed so certain of the rich man's promise. In the end, they took the affair before the mandarin.

The mandarin began by asking the boy to tell exactly what had happened. The boy recounted his conversation with the rich man.

Then the mandarin asked, "How do I know that you did not simply make this whole story up? Do you have a witness?"

The boy calmly replied that, indeed, there had been a witness to their conversation.

"Who was that, child?" asked the mandarin.

"A fly, Your Honor."

"A fly? What do you mean, a fly? You had better watch out," said the mandarin, his face suddenly becoming stern. "I am not here to listen to fantasies."

“Yes, Your Honor, but a fly *was* our witness. You see, there was a fly upon this gentleman’s nose. . . .”

“You little devil, you know that is a pack of lies!” cried the rich man. “The fly was not on my nose, it was on the bamboo pole. . . .” The rich man bit back his words, but it was too late.

The mandarin began to laugh. Then the audience began to laugh. Then the boy and his parents, though timidly, began to laugh, too, and at last, even the rich man laughed.

With one hand on his belly, the mandarin waved his other hand at the rich man. “Pole or no pole, it is clear that the conversation did take place. You made promises to the child. The court orders you to keep your promise.”

Then, still chuckling, he sent them on their way.

### **possession**

**Define:** A **possession** is something that is owned.

**Example:** My most prized **possession** is a stuffed bear that my grandmother gave me when I was born.

**Ask:** What **possession** do you have that is special?

### **rascal**

**Define:** A **rascal** is a mischievous and sometimes annoying person.

**Example:** The **rascals** kept ringing the doorbell and running away.

**Ask:** Why should you not act like a **rascal** at a museum?

### **witness**

**Define:** A **witness** is a person who has seen or heard something and can answer questions about it.

**Example:** My lucky friend was a **witness** when the track star set a new world record.

**Ask:** Why might it be interesting to be a **witness** to a space shuttle lifting off?

## **debt**

**Define:** If you have a **debt**, it means you owe money.

**Example:** Daniel finally earned enough allowance to pay his **debts**.

**Ask:** Why is it important to settle a **debt**?

## **stern**

**Define:** **Stern** means someone or something is harsh or strict.

**Example:** The store owner gave a **stern** look to the kids playing near the comic books.

**Ask:** Why would an animal trainer need to be **stern**?