

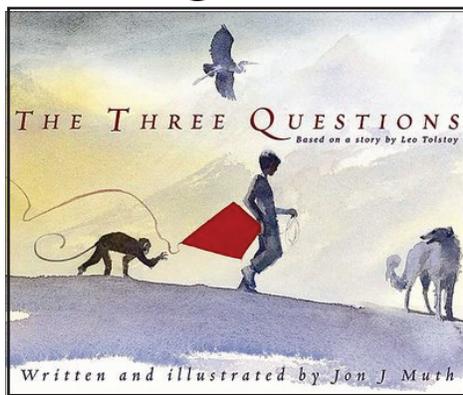


CRUCHLEY'S COLLECTION

Diana Cruchley is an award-winning educator and author, who has taught at elementary and secondary levels. Her workshops are practical, include detailed handouts, and are always enthusiastically received.

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THE THREE QUESTIONS



In this picture book, based on a Leo Tolstoy short story, our hero Nikolai seeks the answer to his three questions from a series of animals, ending with the wise turtle of the mountain. It is his response to a stranger's cry for help that leads him to the answer. It's a simple book based on Zen.

John J. Muth, Scholastic, ©2002,
978-0-439-19996-4

EXTREME WRITING

A springboard from a picture book to personal writing should provide at least three topics if possible. Here are some ideas:

1. Nikolai asks his friends for help. Write about times when you helped friends? Or times when you have been helped?
2. One of the questions is "What Is the right thing to do?" Describe an item from the current news, or an event in your own life, and include what a person should do in this case.
3. Nikolai seeks advice from his friends. Describe times when advice has been helpful, or not.

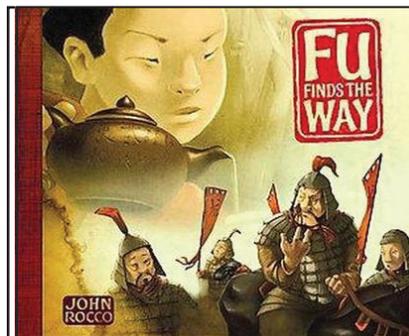
THE ORIGIN OF THE STORY

The Three Questions is adapted from a short story by Leo Tolstoy, famous Russian author. Characters in this picture book come from his life. Nikolai was Tolstoy's brother. Sonya (the heron) was Tolstoy's wife. Gogol (the monkey) was a fellow author, as was Pushikin (the dog). Leo (the turtle) is Tolstoy's first name.

FU FINDS THE WAY

The picture book, *Fu Finds the Way*, sees a young Chinese rice farming boy, preparing for a duel, learn the three virtues of Purpose, Flow, and Patience. There is a set of teaching ideas for this book based on a zen idea as well, on my website, Dianacruchley.com. Consider studying both books and then discuss:

- Which is the most enjoyable to read? Why? What qualities does each book have?
- Is it best to get advice from your friends or from a wise person? Why do you think neither of these "wise advisors" spells out the answer?
- Does one of these stories have better advice for being a good student? Why do you think so?



FABLES

A fable has specific characteristics;

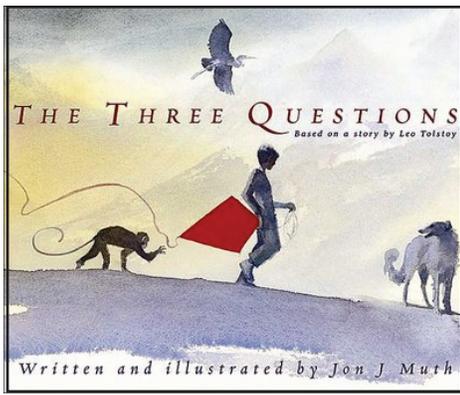
- There are animals in the story.
- The animals talk.
- The animals represent human qualities.
- A fable is very short.
- There is an explicit statement of the moral of the story.

By this definition, which of the qualities of a fable does this story have? not have?

INTERNET VERSION OF THE BOOK

I looked at several Internet versions of this, but I think the silent one is probably best. You could practise it a few times, and then do the read-over in your own voice.

https://www.google.ca/?gfe_rd=cr&ei=kCdRWeH_Iubs8wfd1qKQCA&gws_rd=ssl#tbm=vid&q=the+three+questions+by+jon+muth



THE THREE QUESTIONS, CONT.

LISTEN UP!

Teaching listening skills is an important curricular goal. Ask students to listen carefully to the advice from the three friends as you read and make notes on the chart you provide.

HELPING HANDS

Since the book is essentially about helping NOW, it might be interesting to create a hall display. The three answers:

1. The right time is now.
2. The most important one is the one you are with.
3. The most important thing to do is do good for the one standing beside you.

All around the sign could be cutouts of helping “hands” for things we can do for the “ones standing beside us” at school, “now.”

ASKING “FAT” QUESTIONS

This might be a good time to introduce the difference between a shallow and a deeper question:

Shallow: What is your name?
Do you have pets?
Where do you live?

Deeper: Why do you think we dream?
Why do you think there are so many languages?
Why do you think we can't seem to stop wars?

Questions beginning “why, how, or is there a pattern” often promote deeper thinking.

PHILOSOPHY FOR KIDS

The *Philosophy for Children* website has a collection of some interesting activities for students. Two I found that might be useful were:

1. What is it to be a hero? to be heroic?
2. Give students a small collection of 3 songs. What makes a beautiful song? An ugly song? What makes something beautiful or ugly?

(This can be applied to images as well.)

	STORK	MONKEY	DOG
What is the best time to do things?	plan in advance	watch and pay close attention	get a pack to help you pay attention
Who is the most important one?	those closest to heaven	those who know how to heal the sick	those who make the rules
What is the most important thing to do?	flying	having fun	fighting

Stop reading to consider the chart before continuing to the turtle’s advice. Ask students for their opinion on the best answer. Then read the turtle’s portion to the point at which Nicolai says, “*he had not found the answer to his 3 questions.*” Do they have any thoughts on what the experience with the panda has taught Nicolai? (This is a difficult question. Guesses are good.)

ANIMAL STEREOTYPES

We have established anthropomorphized standardized views of the qualities of certain animals. A dog, for example, is loyal, a friend, a guard, playful, wants to be part of our “pack”. A cat on the other hand is snooty, or grumpy, aristocratic, demanding, and aloof. Give students a list of animals and ask them individually to identify the qualities we have assigned to that animal. They can then collaborate in small groups to identify the qualities on which they all agree.

Try: cow, chicken, wolf, monkey, goat, pig, peacock, beaver, elephant, and mouse.