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Fifty Famous Stories Retold

James Baldwin · *1896 · English original*

This representative route moves from rulers learning limits to courage, honesty, and kindness under pressure.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Which remembered choices make these famous names worth knowing?

"He forgot his hunger; he forgot the cakes;"
King Alfred and the Cakes

The episodes attach names to particular tests, giving persistence, truthfulness, generosity, and courage distinct narrative shapes.

KEY CHARACTERS

King Alfred
Forgets the cakes while planning his country's recovery.

Robert Bruce
Finds renewed purpose in a spider's persistence.

Horatius
Guards a bridge while it is being cut down.

Androclus
Removes a thorn from a lion and is later recognized by it.

Damocles
Learns the danger concealed beneath royal luxury.

George Washington
Admits cutting his father's cherry tree.

Grades 3–5
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

Rulers and ordinary duties

KING ALFRED AND THE CAKES

Alfred's forgotten baking and Canute's encounter with the tide set limits beside royal authority.

- Baldwin opens with kings in ordinary rooms: Alfred and the cakes, Canute at the seashore.
- These are school retellings, short enough to read aloud, of stories already famous.
- The hosted text is the 1896 Fifty Famous Stories Retold, all fifty tales.

> *"He forgot his hunger; he forgot the cakes;"*
> King Alfred and the Cakes

02

A thread of persistence

BRUCE AND THE SPIDER

Bruce sees a spider continue after failure and resolves to gather his forces for another attempt.

- Bruce and the spider is the book's lesson in trying again.
- The spider is watched, then the king rises to try once more.
- Baldwin's wording is plain on purpose; keep it, and do not upgrade it into a later proverb book.

> *"I, too, will try a seventh time!"*
> Bruce and the Spider

03

Truth over property

GEORGE WASHINGTON AND HIS HATCHET

The Washington anecdote places the child's admission beside his father's anger over a damaged tree.

- Washington and his hatchet is here as a story of truth told at a cost.
- The cherry tree is the American school version Baldwin chose to retell.
- Place it among the other duty stories, not as the only American tale in the book.

> *"chopped the tree down with my hatchet."*
> George Washington and his Hatchet

04

Kindness remembered

ANDROCLUS AND THE LION

Androclus helps an injured lion, whose recognition later changes a public spectacle into a rescue.

- Androclus and the Lion (Baldwin's spelling) is a kindness remembered in the arena.
- The lame paw in the cave is the seed of the later recognition.
- Do not silently change Androclus to Androcles in a quotation.

> *"I know that you will help me."*
> Androclus and the Lion

05

Courage at the crossing

HORATIUS AT THE BRIDGE

Horatius and his companions hold off an army while their fellow citizens destroy the bridge.

- Horatius at the Bridge is the Roman stand at the crossing.
- Baldwin retells the famous defense for young readers, beside the other antique stories.
- Compare later, if you wish, with Macaulay's lay of the same stand.

> *"I will keep the / road."*
> Horatius at the Bridge

06

Riches under a sword

THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES

Damocles discovers that luxurious surroundings cannot offer peace when danger hangs immediately overhead.

- The Sword of Damocles hangs over a borrowed feast.
- Dionysius teaches his friend what a tyrant's happiness feels like.
- The sword is a single image; keep Baldwin's telling of how it is hung.

> *"It / was a sharp sword, and it was hung by only a single horse-hair."*
> The Sword of Damocles

Learning through examples

Courage in action

Rank and conduct

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 3–5

1. Names and ordinary words sometimes contain teaching hyphens.
2. The fifty episodes do not form one continuous historical sequence.
3. Distinguish the storyteller's memorable anecdote from a verified event.

Quotations are verbatim from the English original, Project Gutenberg #18442: James Baldwin, Fifty Famous Stories Retold, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/baldwin-fifty-famous-stories-retold/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.