**Week 1, Section 2. Reading the Short Story as a Literary Work**

Now that you have reviewed how to read a literary passage closely, let's practice it using a fable, which is a very, very short story.

When we start reading the short story as a literary genre, we will be reading compact pieces of literature that provide us insights into aspects of the human condition, such as love, revenge, youth, death, and happiness. There are many more insights that writers choose to explore, as you will discover.

To review, here are key components of the short story to be familiar with as you start to read and write about literature. Review these terms closely and be prepared to discuss these elements in your writing. The links will take you to the UMUC Library. The terms are taken from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms,*4th ed.

* [Short Story](http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.umuc.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780198715443.001.0001/acref-9780198715443-e-1051?rskey=ovr8y7&result=1)
* [Plot](http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.umuc.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780198715443.001.0001/acref-9780198715443-e-885?rskey=0VoaiV&result=1)
* [Character](http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.umuc.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780198715443.001.0001/acref-9780198715443-e-187?rskey=0Uy1bp&result=1)
* [Theme](http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.umuc.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780198715443.001.0001/acref-9780198715443-e-1141?rskey=cGeSAc&result=1)

Fables are a good way to approach the analysis of literature. As you may recall, fables are very short stories that contain a moral, or lesson. By focusing on such a short short story, you can practice some key elements of literary analysis before moving into longer pieces of writing.

They are not as simple as they may seem, however. Using animals to convey these moralistic ideas, Aesop sometimes disguised human traits of pride, anger, or love. We have to dig into the details to get to some of these more universal ideas (ones that apply to all humankind).

The fable "The Fox and the Grape" contains the moral "It's easy to despise what you cannot get."

Read the fable here:

The Fox and the Grapes

One hot summer’s day a Fox was strolling through an orchard till he came to a bunch of Grapes just ripening on a vine which had been trained over a lofty branch. ‘Just the thing to quench my thirst,’ quoth he. Drawing back a few paces, he took a run and a jump, and just missed the bunch. Turning round again with a One, Two, Three, he jumped up, but with no greater success. Again and again he tried after the tempting morsel, but at last had to give it up, and walked away with his nose in the air, saying: ‘I am sure they are sour.’

Moral: It is easy to despise what you cannot get.

Citation: Aesop. *"*The Fox and the Grapes." *Aesop's Fables*. 5 May 2016. PDF file.

To the modern reader, the moral might not be easy to understand: what do the fox and grapes have to do with the moral of the fable?

It may help you to watch this creative interpretation of the fable, which demonstrates the moral in a more nearly contemporary setting and using humans.

* Video: [Introduction to Reading Skills: Determining the Moral of a Fable](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBDlv4d1sZM)

If you were assigned to write a paper on this fable and how its moral is demonstrated in the story, you would want to read it carefully to locate specific details that would provide you content to discuss. How would you do that?

Your next step is to practice some critical reading skills through a close-reading practice known as annotation: the process of reading a text and making notes on it and/or highlighting the material.

Please move to the next section to learn about critical reading skills and annotation.