The Lion and the Mouse

Can this unlikely duo actually be friends?

By Sari Bodi and Karen Trott | Art by Dave Clegg
**Characters**
Circle the character you will play.

*Narrators 1, 2, 3 (N1, N2, N3)*

Mouse Family:
* Tiny
* Father
* Mother
Brother 1
* Sister
Brother 2

Owl
Brother Crocodile
Sister Crocodile
Mama Crocodile
Cobra
*Lion
Hunters 1 and 2

*Indicates large speaking role

**Moral of a Fable** A fable is a short story that ends with a moral, or an important lesson. As you read this fable play, think about what the moral is.

**Scene 1**
The Mouse Family Nest

Narrator 1: It is nighttime in the jungle.
Narrator 2: The air is full of sounds.
Narrator 3: Cobras hiss, owls screech, monkeys chatter.
N1: And in the distance, a lion roars.
N2: In its nest, a family of mice prepares to go forage for food.
N3: The smallest mouse, Tiny, tugs on her father's tail.
Tiny: Please, Father, let me go with you tonight.
Father (shaking his head): You're too small. Mother, what do you say?
Mother: It is dangerous out there, Tiny.
Tiny: But I'm fast, and I can escape danger! Sister, Brothers, please tell them!
Brother 1 (nodding): It's true. She can hide in the tiniest of places.
Sister: We can never find her when we play hide-and-seek.

Tiny (stepping forward): You'd be surprised at what I can do.
N1: Finally, Father and Mother relent.
Father: But stay with Sister, Tiny. She is to be your buddy.

**Scene 2**
The Dark Jungle

N2: Tiny's two brothers lead the way.
Brother 1 (pointing): Brother, what's moving on that branch?
Brother 2: Juicy insects! I love how they crunch!
N3: The smallest mouse, Tiny, tugs on her father's tail.
Tiny (eagerly): What will we find to eat?
Sister: Zunna berries. They shine white in the moonlight.
N2: Just then Owl swoops down from the sky.
Sister (shrieking): Tiny, hide quickly!
N3: Sister gets away before Owl can catch her.
N1: But Owl glimpses Tiny.
Owl: Whoo! This little mouse should be easy to catch.
N2: Tiny disappears into a crack in the earth . . .
N3: . . . one so small that a spider could barely fit all eight legs into it.
Owl: Whoo! Where did my little dinner go?
N1: Owl circles overhead, then flies off.

Scene 3
The Watering Hole
N2: When all is quiet, Tiny creeps out.
N3: All around her are frightening shadows.
Tiny: Sister, this place is scary. Where are you?
N1: Tiny comes upon a watering hole.
N2: Two young crocodiles are riding on their mother’s back.
Brother Crocodile: Mama, there’s a mouse! Let me catch it!
Sister Crocodile (whining): But it’s my turn to catch a mouse!
Mama Crocodile (whispering): No fighting or you’ll scare away your dinner.
N3: Mama Crocodile glides toward the little mouse.
N1: But Tiny dives into the water and disappears among the reeds.
N2: She reaches the opposite bank and climbs out . . .
N3: . . . right into the path of a coiling cobra.
Cobra (hissing): Well, you ccccccertainly are bite-ssssszed.
N1: Tiny backs away as Cobra rears up.
Tiny: Eeeek!
Cobra: Sssstay sstill, it’ll be over ssssoon.
N2: Thinking fast, Tiny leaps into the air . . .
N3: . . . up and over Cobra’s coils. The little mouse darts away.

Scene 4
By the Zunna Berry Bush
N1: Tiny spies a bush laden with white fruit.
Tiny (excited): Zunna berries! I’m famished.
N2: But they dangle just out of her grasp.
Tiny: If I climb this boulder, I might be able to reach them.
N3: But just as Tiny takes hold of a berry . . .
N1: . . . the boulder—really a sleeping lion . . .
N2: . . . snatches her by the tail.
Lion (growling): How dare you awaken me! I’ve a mind to eat you!
Tiny: Please sir, no! Here, have this berry instead.
Lion: Do you not know I am a carnivore?
Tiny: What does that mean?
Lion: I eat only meat, no matter how miniature the morsel.
N3: Tiny feels Lion’s warm breath.
N1: His sharp teeth glint in the moonlight.
Tiny: Wait! If you spare my life, someday I will return the favor.
N2: Lion roars with laughter.
Lion: You? You are no bigger than my front tooth.
Tiny: I may be small, but you’d be surprised at what I can do.
N3: This makes Lion laugh all the harder.
Lion: Then I will set you free. If nothing else, you are entertaining.

Scene 5
The Mouse Family Nest
N1: Tiny races straight to the nest and into
Mother’s arms.

**Mother:** You’re alive! We have been so worried!

**N2:** Sister gives Tiny a hug.

**Sister:** I’m sorry. I had to run away. But I looked for you everywhere.

**Tiny:** I looked for you too.

**N3:** Tiny tells her family all that she’s been through.

**Tiny (hanging her head):** Father, maybe I am not as capable as I thought.

**Father:** Then stay back in the nest until you’re bigger.

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**Scene 6**

**Deep in the Jungle**

**N1:** Two hunters have been stalking Lion for days.

**Hunter 1:** Maybe we should give up. He’s too hard to catch.

**Hunter 2:** No, we need to outthink him. Let’s lay a trap.

**Hunter 1:** All right. I have a good net.

**Hunter 2:** We can hang it from a tree by the watering hole.

**Hunter 1:** And disguise it with leaves and twigs.

**N2:** After setting up the net, the hunters depart, confident that Lion will be snared by morning.

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**Scene 7**

**The Watering Hole**

**N3:** That night, Lion approaches the watering hole.

**N1:** A giant net falls from the tree . . .
He’s in danger!
N1: Forgetting her fears, she ventures into the night.
N2: Lion’s howls lead her to the watering hole.
Lion: Have you come to taunt me, now that I am powerless?
Tiny: Not at all! I said I would help you, and here I am.
Lion (sneering): How can you possibly help me?
Tiny: You’d be surprised at what I can do.
N3: With her sharp little teeth, Tiny gnaws at the thick ropes.
N1: She chews on them throughout the night.
N2: As the sun rises, Tiny bites through the last piece of rope.
Tiny (leaping up): I’m done, Lion. You are free!
N3: Lion rises to his feet, and the net breaks apart.
Lion: Never could I imagine being saved by such a small creature.
Tiny: You see? Sometimes even the smallest can help the strong.
N1: In appreciation, Lion bows before his new friend.
N2: He carries her to the zunna berry bush . . .
N3: . . . and lifts her up high, so she can have a feast fit for a queen.

N2: . . . trapping him in a twisted mesh of ropes.
N3: The more Lion thrashes, the more tangled he becomes.
Lion (howling): Creatures of the forest, help me! Help me!
N1: But no one comes to the aid of the ferocious beast.
N2: Safe in her nest, Tiny is asleep.
N3: Lion’s roars awaken her.
Tiny: It’s the lion who spared my life.

WRITE TO WIN
The moral, or lesson, of a fable is usually written in one sentence. Write a moral for this fable, then explain why it is fitting, using examples from the play. Send it to “Fable Contest” by October 15, 2015. Ten winners will each receive a copy of Unlikely Friendships by Jennifer Holland. See page 2 for details.
An Unlikely Friendship

After a terrible disaster, a tortoise and a baby hippo became the best of friends

On December 26, 2004, the deadliest tsunami in recent history struck the coasts of Indonesia and nearby countries. More than 230,000 people died. The waves were so powerful that they traveled all the way across the Indian Ocean and crashed into the eastern coast of Africa.

Among those that lost everything was a baby hippo named Owen. His entire family was swept away by the waters, and Owen was stranded on a reef in the ocean. He was rescued by a group of caring people and brought to Haller Park, a sanctuary in the African country of Kenya that provides a safe home for wild animals in need of help.

The park’s manager, Paula Kahumbu, knew that the baby hippo could not survive alone in the wild. There were other hippos at the park, and Kahumbu hoped that one would someday befriend Owen.

A Grumpy Tortoise

In the meantime, Owen had other ideas. He rushed over to a 130-year-old tortoise named Mzee (muh-ZAY) and lay down behind him. The tortoise, famously grumpy, hissed at Owen and scuttled away. Mzee had always preferred to be alone. But Owen didn’t give up. He followed Mzee everywhere, and soon enough an unlikely friendship was born.

Owen and Mzee ate together, swam together, and slept side by side.

Animals that are so different don’t usually bond, especially when they can easily hurt each other. Owen has razor-sharp teeth that could bite through Mzee’s shell. Mzee’s jaws have sharp ridges that could slice through Owen’s leathery hide.

Friends in Need

Yet the two trusted each other. Sometimes when Owen yawned, Mzee would put his head inside Owen’s mouth. When Mzee needed help climbing over a log, Owen nudged him over.

Experts have struggled to explain how an old tortoise and a 600-pound baby hippo became best friends. Then again, is it really so hard to understand? Owen had lost his family and needed comfort and companionship to survive. Perhaps Mzee sensed this. Sometimes our most important friendships are the most unexpected.