The Tortoise and the Hare

A classic fable pits a speedy rabbit against a slow and steady turtle. Guess who wins?
SCENE 1
A Village in Ancient Greece

Narrator 1: At the village gate, children gather.

Narrator 2: They welcome Aesop, the celebrated storyteller.

Child 1: Aesop, can we hear “The Boy Who Cried Wolf”?

Child 2: I like “The Lion and the Mouse”!

Aesop: Children, I shall decide once you are all gathered.

Child 3: Hurry, Niko! Aesop is waiting for you!

Child 1: Niko, you are always so slow.

Aesop: Well, now I know which fable to tell: “The Tortoise and the Hare.”

SCENE 2
A Stream in the Woods

Aesop: Deep in the woods, animals gather.

Narrator 1: One is boastful Hare.

Hare (speaking quickly): I’m as fast as a lightning flash.

Narrator 2: Another is slow-moving Tortoise.

Tortoise (speaking slowly): That’s me. I’m as slow as moss growing on a tree.

Aesop: Hare runs in circles around the other animals.

Hare: I’m faster than anyone here—even you, Fox.

Fox: It’s true, Hare. When you run it’s as if the wind is chasing you.

Hare: But the wind

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won’t race me. How about you, Fox?
Fox (turning away): No.
Hare: Raccoon?
Raccoon: No, not today.
Hare: You all just don’t like losing.
Narrator 1: Tortoise pokes her head out of her shell.
Tortoise: Well, Hare, I think you can be beaten.
Hare (laughing): Really, Tortoise? Who will beat me? You?
Tortoise: Let’s have a race and find out.
Narrator 2: Porcupine worries the race will not be fair.
Porcupine: Hare should run backward the whole way.
Tortoise: No need. Hare, I will race you fair and square.
Hare: Tortoise, you’re on!
Narrator 1: Owl draws a line in the sand.
Owl (with authority): The race begins here and ends at the Leaning Pine.
Narrator 2: Owl hoots, and they’re off.
Narrator 1: Before Tortoise even has a chance to lift her foot, Hare sprints out of sight.

**SCENE 3**

*The Top of Clover Hill*

Aesop: Hare encounters a family of deer.

Deer 1 (looking up): What’s the rush, Hare?
Hare: I’m racing Tortoise.
Deer 2: Why don’t you pick on someone your own speed?
Hare: No one is forcing her. She wants to race.
Deer 1: Where is Tortoise now?
Hare (looking back): She’s still near the starting line.
Deer 2: How can she possibly win?
Hare: She can’t. So I have plenty of time to snack on some clover.
Narrator 2: Meanwhile, Raccoon and Porcupine give Tortoise advice.
Raccoon: Don’t drag your shell. It’s slowing you down!
Porcupine: The race will soon be over if you don’t speed up!
Tortoise: I just need to put one foot in front of the other until I get there.
Raccoon: Tortoise, let us help. We can push you along.
Tortoise (shaking her head): That wouldn’t be fair.
Porcupine: But Hare may already be at the finish line!
Tortoise: And then again, he may not be.

**SCENE 4**

*The Top of Clover Hill, Later*

Aesop: With his belly full of clover, Hare finally looks up.
Narrator 1: He calls to a crow digging for worms nearby.
Hare: Crow, has Tortoise passed by here yet?
Crow: No. I’ll fly overhead and take a look.
Hare (peering up): Do you see her?
Crow: Caw! She’s at the bottom of the hill.
Hare: It will take her forever to get up here.
Crow: It looks as if she’s hardly moving.
Hare: Then I have plenty of time to rest in the shade.

Narrator 2: Hours later, Hare awakens groggy and confused.

Hare (yawning): I must have dozed off. What was I doing?

Crow: Caw! Have you forgotten your race? Tortoise hasn’t.

Hare (leaps up): The race! Where is she now?

Crow: She’s approaching the finish line at the Leaning Pine.

Hare: No! How did she get that far ahead of me?

Narrator 1: Hare sprints off and disappears in a cloud of dust.

**SCENE 5**

The Leaning Pine

Aesop: The animals gather to cheer Tortoise on.

Porcupine: Keep going, Tortoise. You’re almost at the finish line!

Raccoon: Look, here comes Hare!

Hare: Out of my way, Tortoise. This race is mine!

Tortoise: It’s not over yet, Hare!

Narrator 2: Tortoise takes one more step and stretches out her neck.

Narrator 1: And with that, she crosses the finish line first.

Porcupine: Tortoise is the winner!

Hare: It can’t be! I’m the fastest runner!

Crow: Yes, but Hare, you dawdled and snacked and napped all along the way. Caw!

Fox: While Tortoise kept going and never wavered.

Narrator 2: The animals congratulate Tortoise as Hare slinks away.

Narrator 1: Aesop stands up and looks around at the children.

Aesop: As you know, there is always a moral to my fables. What might this one be?

Narrator 2: The children quickly raise their hands, and as always, Niko is the slowest.

Aesop: Yes, Niko?

Niko: (grinning) I know this one!
What does it take to be successful? Is it talent? Money? Having famous friends to help you? Sure, some talent, cash, and mighty pals can help. But the real key to success, experts say, is grit: the ability to set a goal and to keep working toward it, no matter what gets in your way. People with grit are determined. They work hard. They don’t give up, even if they fail along the way.

Take George Washington. Before he became President, he was a general in the Revolutionary War. His army lost two huge battles. His soldiers were starving. Washington was nearly fired. But he had grit. He rallied his troops, led them across the Delaware River, and soon they were on the road to victory.

Olympic gymnast Gabby Douglas has grit too. She was always a talented gymnast—her mother remembers tiny Gabby acing her flips even before she had lessons. But becoming an Olympian was a long road, with years of grueling hard work, painful injuries, and separation from her family. Still, Gabby had the grit to keep pursuing her goal.

The list goes on: There’s Katy Perry, who was fired by three
People with grit, Duckworth says, tackle their goals like long-distance runners—pushing past obstacles slowly and steadily.

Grit is not a new idea. Americans have long valued hard work and perseverance. Think of the millions of immigrants who come to this country. Many start out penniless and work for years to get ahead. And picture the pioneers who settled America's West, traveling for months, enduring blizzards and dust storms and wild animals to reach their goal of starting a new life.

How can you develop grit if you don't already have it? The answer is surprising: You need to learn how to fail. That’s right. When you fail a spelling test, don’t get a part in the play, or strike out in the play-off game, you need to figure out what went wrong and try again. People with grit don’t blame other people for their failures. They try to learn from them. Most important, they don’t let setbacks stop them from pursuing their goals.

“People with grit don’t believe that failure is permanent,” Duckworth says. “They can always find ways to improve and move forward.”

So the next time you flub your science experiment, miss the three-point shot, or sing off-key, think of George or Gabby or Thomas or Steve. Brush yourself off and try again. With the right attitude, you could be onto something truly great.

“Hard days are the best because that’s where champions are made.”

WRITE TO WIN!

What is the moral, or lesson, of the play *The Tortoise and the Hare*? What examples in “The Secret of Success?” support this moral? Send your response to “Tortoise Contest” by May 15, 2014. Ten winners will each receive a copy of *Annie Sullivan and the Trials of Helen Keller* by Joseph Lambert. See page 2 for details.