

AESOP'S FABLE: Belling the Cat

A Play Written by Connie Frank

Narrator on the Science of Predator versus Prey: Apparently, mice have always been afraid of cats. Cats, rats, and other predators produce a chemical signal that terrifies mice. When mice detect specific proteins found in cat saliva and rat urine, they react with fear and run away as fast as they can.



Although they are natural enemies, cats are not always up for hunting mice and eating them. Wild, untamed cats are far more aggressive than domesticated house cats when chasing mice because it is their source of food. For this story, the cat is a wild, untamed cat, a dangerous predator for the mice.

Characters:

Narrator:

Father Tim:

Deena's Mother:

Georgie's Dad:

Georgie:

Deena:

Script:

Narrator: The story begins in a very creaky old basement in the bottom of the oldest business building in the town square, which holds the clock tower. For humans this would be a scary place, but for mice, it is the perfect place for their meeting. The oldest mouse who had called the meeting as leader of the mice family, Father Tim, was worried.

Father Tim: "Greetings, my family. Greetings"

Narrator: The old mouse called out to get everyone's attention. Most of the mice family had been talking in hushed tones in small groups. Some were nodding their heads, as though they knew why the emergency meeting was called.

Deena's Mother: "Everyone settle down now. Father Tim is speaking."

Narrator: The room grew quiet. Even the rotten boards of the basement ceased making noise and the children froze, knowing the tone in the voices had hushed.

Father Tim: (His head bowed) "I have some bad news to give you. My son, Demetrius, is dead."

Narrator: The silence was deep. Everyone there was shocked. Demetrius had been the golden boy of the mice, the next in line to be the leader of their family. All faces stared at Father Tim, whose head was still bowed.

Georgie's Dad: (Walking up to Father Tim): "Tim, how did this happen? "

Narrator: Other mice around the room began talking in hushed tones, sad with eyes closing in shock. The children stared at their parents, and Deena's Mother reached for Deena, holding her close.

Father Tim: (a tear sliding down his mouse face): "The cat got him. This morning. Down by the candy shop."

Georgie: "No! It is not possible! Demetrius knew that area very well! He took me there all the time!"

Georgie's Dad: (Still staring at Father Tim): "You mean that big fat yellow tabby with the green eyes? The one that has been attacking everyone who goes out on the street?"

Father Tim: (Tears gleaming in his eyes now): "Yes, that is the one. I saw that cat attack him with my own eyes." (Father Tim wiped his face.) "Yes, he is gone. My Demetrius is gone."

Deena's Mother: (Pulling Deena closer so Deena squealed at the tightness): "What can we do? That cat is a menace. It needs to be stopped! It will get all of us if we don't stop it!"

Georgie's Dad: (Stepping back twice): You are right. That cat is frightening everyone, chasing all of us out of our homes." (He dropped his head).

Narrator:	Many plans were discussed. Parents sent their children to the corner to play while they discussed how they could stop the cat, but every idea seemed impossible or ridiculous. Finally, Deena walked back to her mother, slid her paw into her mother's paw and raised her hand.
Father Tim:	(With one eyebrow raised): "Yes, Deena? Do you need to go to the bathroom?"
Deena:	"I am sorry about Demetrius. He was my friend. He was everyone's friend. (She then looked right at Father Tim). "No, I don't need to go, but I have an idea.
Father Tim:	(Looking stern): Now, Deena, this is a serious problem that only adults can solve. You go back to playing with the other kids."
Deena:	(Yanking her paw from her mother and looking straight into Father Tim's eyes.) "I have a plan that seems very simple, but I know it will be successful. "
Narrator:	Everyone looked astonished at the audacity of a young mouse speaking up, let alone having an idea to stop the cat.
Deena:	(Looking at Father Tim's stern face, dropped her head.): "All we have to do is to hang a bell about the Cat's neck. "
Georgie's Dad:	(Looking shocked) "A bell? A bell!"
Deena:	(nodding) "When we hear the bell ringing, we will know immediately that our enemy is coming."
Narrator:	Every mouse in the room stared at Deena. They all looked thoughtful. Deena's Mother looked anxiously around, wondering if she would have to defend her daughter for speaking out.
Georgie's Dad:	"That is a really good idea, Deena! It really is a good idea." (Nodding and looking thoughtful).
Georgie:	(Walking up and looking directly at his dad. "Deena has some really great ideas, Dad. It could work!"
Georgie's Dad:	"Why didn't I think of that before?" (Nodding and looking around the room at the very happy faces.)
Narrator:	Father Tim had sat down on an old wooden soup spoon, looking thoughtful. He then stood up.
Father Tim:	(Speaking slowly and looking around the room): "I will say that the plan of this young Mouse is very good." (Then he slowly looked into the eyes of the mice in the room, his family, and his friends. "But let me ask one question: Who will bell the Cat?"
Narrator:	As it turns out, every mouse in the room turned away from Father Tim at this question. The young mice looked at their parents, expectant and hopeful, but not even one offered to bell the cat. Some of the adult mice murmured to everyone that it was too dangerous, or they had children that would need them to survive in the future. Not a single adult offered to do it. Deena and Georgie raised their hands to offer to do it, but their parents quickly grabbed their paws and walked away.
Narrator:	Not a single mouse at the meeting was willing to try, even though they thought Deena had a good plan. So, the mice family continued to live in fear.

The moral of this story is this:

"It is one thing to say that something should be done, but quite a different matter to do."