

## Animal Folklore on Stamps of the World

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*"Animals of all kinds feature in rituals, legends and folk tales throughout world culture, reflecting the curiosity humans have always had about other species with which they share the earth ... and the desire to share the remarkable powers of other species"* (Pickering, 1999).

Celebrated in art and literature, folklore is associated with societies, traditional as well as modern, and may be passed on through the print media or exclusively orally, via tales, proverbs, poems, chants, ballads and songs. Animals feature prominently in many folklore, an important function being transmission of societal values or shared ideas of a specific ethnic group or society, including teaching character traits, and among other things, kindness and concern for others, value of hard work, respect for elders and remembering a promise made (Das, 2011). Animals may also feature in tales in the realms of fantasy, such as those that either impart wisdom or nurse and often lend supernatural help to (human) heroes. Some tales are spun to tell why things are as they are, such as, why cats can climb trees, the memory of elephants, the wily cunning of foxes, etc. In a nutshell, animals provide an engrossing medium to engage children in tales that teach and impart societal values and warn them of perceived dangers (Creany, 2013).

Perhaps the most famous amongst these are the tales of Aesop (ca. 620–560 BCE), born a slave in Greece and famous in his time as a story-teller, and a near contemporary of the Buddha (ca. 563 BCE or ca. 480 BCE – ca. 483 BCE or ca. 400 BCE) himself. Historians of folklore have long debated the source of these stories, whether the original source was in fact, eastern, such as the tales of Buddha's previous lives (known as the *Jatakas*) or the *Panchatantra* of India, many of which feature animal characters, centred around a virtuous being, animal or human.

Postage stamps is an easy medium for the transmission of information, and consequently, the use of stamps in education is common (Yardley, 2015). Greece (as well as Cyprus and Hungary) have issued stamps illustrating some of the stories from Aesop's Tales. The story of the hare and the tortoise, for instance, illustrates the importance of ponderous labour and of humility, and the story of the fox and the stork, whose moral lesson is "One bad turn deserves another". Many are thus fables, a subgenre of folktales that uses anthropomorphic animals to highlight a particular point.

Closer to home are the celebrated tales of Sang Kancil (a mouse deer) getting the better of Sang Buaya and Sang Bedal (two crocodiles), that have been immortalised in philately. Folktales such as these depict the wise/silly animal motif, in which the smaller one outwits a much larger animal.

Stamps, because of their ubiquitous nature, often attractive design and interesting thematic content, are a strong source of dissemination of societal values, once conveyed by word of mouth in the form of animal-centric folklore. While the effect on human culture is evident in many of these tales, a central observation is that all societies, traditional or otherwise, employ animal-based stories as a medium for early learning.