

Belling the Cat

Fable by Aesop

What makes it so difficult for the mice to solve their problem?

1 Mice and cats have been the bitterest of enemies for as long as anyone
2 can recall. So how is it that the swift and clever mice never found a way
3 to control their opponent? This age-old tale may guide you to understand
4 the depth of the problem.

5 Long ago, a cat in one town was especially successful at attacking the
6 local mice. Fearing for their future, the anxious mice decided to gather
7 for a crucial meeting. Their goal was to devise a strategy to outsmart their
8 feline enemy. Every mouse willingly attended, and hopes were high.

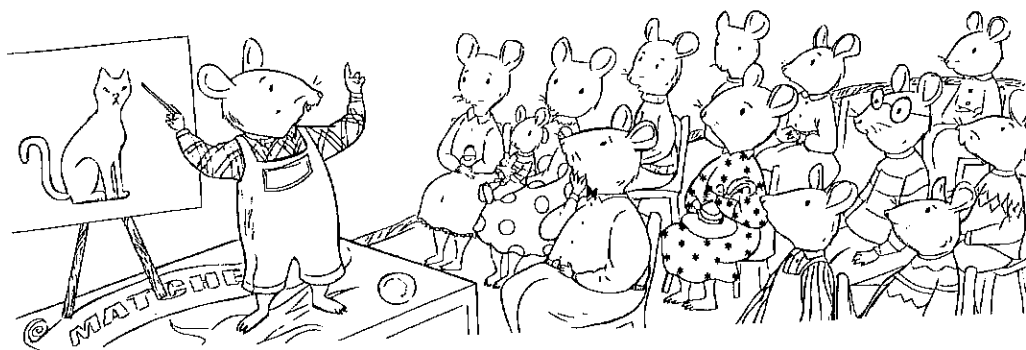
9 Many mice addressed the crowd, each with a different idea for their
10 protection and safety. But no idea seemed to satisfy the group. At last a
11 young mouse arose to speak to the crowd. "My friends, I wish to offer a
12 new proposal. As I see it, our biggest problem is the sly manner in which
13 the cat advances toward us. If we could receive a signal of its sneaky
14 approach, we would likely escape. So I recommend that we obtain a
15 small bell that makes a clear ring. We simply hang the bell from a strong
16 cord and then tie that cord around the cat's neck. From that moment
17 onward, any movement the cat makes will cause the bell to ring. Thanks
18 to our good ears, the bell will warn us when our enemy nears. It should
19 provide ample warning to keep us safe and out of sight."

20 This new idea drew loud cheers until an elderly gray mouse slowly
21 stood up. "We must commend our young friend for a highly original
22 idea. But before we charge ahead, I must pose one simple question. Who
23 among us volunteers to be the one to bell the cat?"

24 The mice looked embarrassed and uneasy. Complete silence overtook
25 the group.

26
27

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



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▶ Answer each question. Give evidence from the fable.

1 Which of the following animals is a *feline* (line 8)?

- A. rat
- B. hawk
- C. leopard
- D. old mouse

How did you determine your response? _____

2 Which is another way to state the lesson that this fable teaches?

- A. Trouble comes from the direction we least expect it.
- B. It is easy to suggest impossible remedies.
- C. Necessity is the mother of invention.
- D. Slow and steady wins the race.

What evidence in the text helped you answer? _____

3 According to the young mouse, what characteristic behavior of the mouse-eating cat makes it so especially dangerous?

4 Explain in your own words the problem with the young mouse's idea. _____

5 Why did "complete silence" overtake the group after the old mouse's question (line 24)?

