



Name: _____

Mercury and the Woodman an Aesop fable

A poor Woodman was cutting down a tree near the edge of a deep pool in the forest. It was late in the day and the Woodman was tired. He had been working since sunrise and his swings were not as good as they had been early that morning. Thus it happened that the axe slipped and flew out of his hands into the pond.

The Woodman was in despair. The axe was all he possessed with which to make a living, and he had not money enough to buy a new one. As he stood wringing his hands and weeping, the god Mercury suddenly appeared and asked what the trouble was. The Woodman told what had happened, and straightway the kind Mercury dived into the pond. When he came up again he held a wonderful golden axe.



"Is this your axe?" Mercury asked the Woodman.

"No," answered the honest Woodman, "that is not my axe."

Mercury laid the golden axe on the bank and sprang back into the pool. This time he brought up an axe of silver, but the Woodman declared again that his axe was just an ordinary one with a wooden handle.

Mercury dived down for the third time, and when he came up again he had the very axe that had been lost.

The poor Woodman was very glad that his axe had been found and could not thank the kind god enough. Mercury was greatly pleased with the Woodman's honesty.

"I admire your honesty," he said, "and as a reward you may have all three axes, the gold and the silver as well as your own."



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1. What is the moral (lesson) of the story?

- a) You shouldn't swing an axe.
- b) It is best to be honest.
- c) Don't chop wood near a pond.

2. Circle a sentence from the passage that helped you figure out the moral.

3. Read the following sentence from the passage. "The woodman was in despair." What does it mean to be in despair?

4. Have you ever been rewarded for being honest? What happened?

5. Highlight the dialogue in the fable.

6. Reread the text aloud. Use a different voice for the woodman and Mercury.