

Jack, The Cunning Thief
Author Unknown

Best for Grades 5 and higher.

Parts (17):	Narrator 1	Narrator 2	Narrator 3	Narrator 4	Narrator 5	
	Old Woman	Jack	Headman	Man 1	Man 2	
	Farmer	Father	Squire	Voice 1	Voice 2	Mistress



Narrator 1: Jack, the Cunning Thief, an old Irish tale

Narrator 2: THERE was a poor farmer who had three sons, and on the very same day each of the three boys went to seek their fortune. The eldest two were sensible, industrious young men; the youngest never did much at home that was any use. He loved to be setting snares for rabbits, and tracing hares in the snow, and inventing all sorts of funny tricks to annoy people at first and then set them laughing.

Narrator 3: The three parted at a cross-roads, and Jack took the lonest. The day turned out rainy, and he was wet and weary, you may depend, at nightfall, when he came to a lonesome house a little off the road.

Old Man: "What do you want?"

Narrator 4: asked a bleary-eyed old woman, that was sitting at the fire.

Jack: "My supper and a bed to be sure!"

Narrator 1: answered Jack.

Old Woman: "You can't get that here."

Narrator 2: the old woman responded.

Jack: "What's to hinder me?"

Narrator 3: Jack asked the old woman.

Old Woman: "The owners of the house are six robbers who are usually out till three or four o'clock in the morning, and if they find you here they'll skin you alive at the very least."

Narrator 4: the old woman warned

Jack: "Well, I think,"

Narrator 1: said Jack,

Jack: "that their very most couldn't be much worse. Come, give me something out of the cupboard, for here I'll stay. Skinning is not much worse than catching your death of cold in a ditch or under a tree on such a night as this."

Narrator 2: The old woman was afraid, and gave him a good supper; and when he was going to bed he said if she let any of the six honest men disturb him when they came home she'd be sorrow for it. When he awoke in the morning, there were six ugly-looking man standing 'round his bed. He leaned on his elbow, and looked at them with great contempt.

Head Man: "Who are you,"

Narrator 3: asked the head man, gruffly

Chief: "and what's your business?"

Jack: "My name,"

Narrator 4: says jack,

Jack: "is Master Thief, and my business just now is to find apprentices and workmen. If I find you any good, maybe I'll give you a few lessons."

Narrator 1: The men were a little cowed, but the head man says,

Headman: "Well, get up, and after breakfast, we'll see who is to be the master, and who the journeyman."

Narrator 2: They were just done breakfast, when what should they see but a farmer driving a fine large goat to market.

Jack: "Will any of you, undertake to steal that goat from the owner before he gets out of the wood, and that without the smallest violence?"

Narrator 3: Jack asks of the men.

Man 1: "I couldn't do it,"

Narrator 4: says one of the men

Man 2: "I couldn't do it,"

Narrator 1: says another.

Jack: "I'm your master,"

Narrator 2: says Jack,

Jack: "and I'll do it."

Narrator 3: He slipped out and went through the trees where there was a bend in the road, and laid down his right brogue in the very middle of it. Then he ran on to another bend, and laid down his left brogue and went and hid himself.

Narrator 4: When the farmer sees the first brogue, he says to himself,

Farmer: "That would be worth something if it had the fellow, but it is worth nothing by itself."

Narrator 1: He goes on till he comes to the second brogue.

Farmer: "What a fool I was,"

Narrator 1: says the farmer,

Farmer: "not to pick up the other! I'll go back for it."

Narrator 2: So he tied the goat to a sapling in the hedge, and returned for the brogue.

But Jack, who was hiding behind a tree had it already on his foot, and when the man was beyond the bend he picked up the other and loosened the goat, and led him off through the wood.

Narrator 3: Of course, the poor man didn't find the first brogue, and when he came back he didn't find the second, either, and his goat was gone.

Farmer: "What will I do after promising Johanna to buy her a shawl. I must only go and drive another beast to the market unknownst. I'd never hear the last of it if Joan found out what a fool I made of myself."

Narrator 4: The men were in great admiration at Jack, and wanted him to tell them how he had tricked the farmer and gotten the goat, but he wouldn't tell them.

Narrator 1: By-and-by, they see the poor man driving a fine fat wether the same way.

Jack: "Who'll steal that wether, before it's out of the wood, and no roughness used?"

Narrator 2: Jack challenges the men.

Man 1: "I couldn't,"

Narrator 3: says one man,

Man 2: "and I couldn't"

Narrator 4: says another.

Jack: "I'll try,"

Narrator 1: says Jack

Jack: "Give me a good rope."

Narrator 2: The poor farmer was jogging along and thinking of his misfortune, when he sees a man hanging from the bough of a tree.

Farmer: "Lord save us!"

Narrator 3: says he.

Farmer: "That corpse wasn't there an hour ago."

Narrator 4: The poor farmer went on about half a quarter of a mile, and there was another corpse again hanging over the road.

Farmer: "Am I in my right senses?"

Narrator 1: There was another turn in the road about the same distance beyond, and just past it a third corpse was hanging.

Farmer: "Oh, murder!"

Narrator 2: said he to himself sorrowfully.

Farmer: "I'm beside myself. What would bring three hung men so near one another? I must be mad. I'll go back and see if the others are there still."

Narrator 3: He tied the wether to a sapling, and back he went. But when he was round the bend, down came the corpse, and loosened the wether, and drove it home through the wood to the house of the six men. Imagine how the poor farmer felt when he could find no one dead or alive going or coming, nor his wether, nor the rope that fastened him.

Farmer: "Oh, misfortunate day!

Narrator 4: "cried he.

Farmer: "What'll Joan say to me now? My morning gone, and the goat and wether lost. I must sell something to make the price of the shawl. Well, the fat bullock is in the nearest field. She won't see me taking it."

Narrator 1: Well, the robbers were greatly surprised when Jack came back with the wether!

Head Man: "If you do another trick like this,"

Narrator 2: said the head man,

Head Man: "I'll resign my command to you."

Narrator 3: They soon saw the farmer going by again, this time driving a fat bullock.

Jack: "Who'll bring that fat bullock here, and use no violence?"

Narrator 4: Jack challenged the men.

Man 1: "I couldn't,"

Narrator 1: says one robber

Man 2: "and I couldn't,"

Narrator 2: says another.

Jack: "Well, I'll try,"

Narrator 3: says Jack, and away he went into the wood.

Narrator 4: The farmer was about at the spot where he saw the first brogue, when he heard the bleating of a goat off to his right in the wood.

Narrator 1: He cocked his ears, and the next thing he heard was the baaing of a sheep.

Farmer "Gracious!"

Narrator 2: says says the old farmer

Farmer: "maybe that is my own that I lost."

Narrator 3: There was more bleating and more baaing.

Farmer: "There they are as sure as a gun,

Narrator 4: says he, and he tied his bullock to a sapling that grew in the hedge, and away he went into the wood. When he got near the place where the cries came from, he heard them a little further on still, and on he followed them. At last,

when he was about half a mile from the spot where he tied the beast, the cries stopped altogether.

Narrator 1: After searching and searching till he was tired, he returned for his bullock; but there wasn't the ghost of a bullock there, nor any where else that he searched.

Narrator 2: This time, when the thieves saw Jack and his prize coming home, they couldn't help shouting out,

All Robbers: "Jack must be our chief."

Narrator 3: So there was nothing but feasting and drinking hand to fist the rest of the day. Before they went to bed, they showed Jack the cave where their money was hid, and all their disguises in another cave, and swore obedience to him.

Narrator 4: One morning, when they were at breakfast, about a week later, the head man said to Jack,

Headman: "Will you mind the house for us to-day while we are at the fair of Mochurry? We haven't a spree for ever so long, and you must get your turn whenever you like."

Jack: "Never say't twice,"

Narrator 1: says Jack, and off they went.

Narrator 2: After they were gone says Jack to the wicked housekeeper,

Jack: "Do these fellows ever make you a present?"

Old Woman: "Never!"

Narrator 3: Exclaimed the old woman.

Jack: "Well, come along with me, and I'll make you a rich woman."

Narrator 4: Proclaimed Jack.

Narrator 1: He took her to the treasure cave, and while she was in raptures, gazing at the heaps of gold and silver. Jack filled his pockets as full as they could hold, put more into a little bag, and walked out, locking the door on the old hag, and leaving the key in the lock. He then put on a rich suit of clothes, took the goat, and the wether, and the bullock, and drove them before him to the farmer's house.

Narrator 2: Joan and her husband were at the door; and when they saw the animals, they clapped their hands and laughed for joy.

Jack: "Do you know who owns them beasts, neighbours?"

Narrator 3: Asked Jack of the farmer and his wife.

Farmer and wife: "I believe they are surely ours."

Jack: "I found them straying in the wood. Is that bag with ten guineas in it that's hung round the goat's neck yours?"

Farmer: "Faith, it isn't."

Narrator 4: replied the farmer, to which Jack then responded

Jack: "Well, you may as well keep it for a Godsend; I don't want it.',

"Heaven be in your road, good gentleman !"

Narrator 1: Jack travelled on till he came to his father's house in the dusk of the evening.
He went in and asked:

Jack: "Could I have a night's lodging here?"

Narrator 2: Not recognizing Jack as his son, his father said politely,

Father: "Oh, sir, our place isn't fit for the likes of a gentleman such as you."

Jack: "Oh, father, don't you know your own son ?"

Narrator 3: Jack said, and they looked at him more carefully, and at last recognizing him, it was only a strife to see who'd have him in their arms first. HIS father asked:

Father: "But, Jack, where did you get those fine clothes ?"

Jack: "Oh, you may as well ask me where I got all that money?"

Narrator 4: said he, emptying his pockets on the table. Well, they got in a great fright, but when he told them his adventures, they were easier in mind, and all went to bed in great content. Then, the next morning, he asked of his father,

Jack: "Father go over to the landlord, and tell him I wish to be married to his daughter."

Father: "Faith, I'm afraid he'd only set the dogs at me. If he asks me how you made your money, what'll I say ?"

Narrator 1: his father replied, and Jack gave him this answer:

Jack: "Tell him I am a master thief, and that there is no one equal to me in the three kingdoms; that I am worth a thousand pounds, and all taken from the biggest rogues unhanged. Speak to him when the young lady is nearby."

Father: "It's a droll message you're sending me on : I'm afraid it won't end well."

Narrator 2: his father said, but he went to speak to the neighbor as Jack had requested. The old man came back in two hours.

Jack: "Well, what news?"

Narrator 3: Jack asked.

Father: "Droll news, enough. The lady didn't seem a bit unwilling. I suppose it's not the first time you've spoken to her; and the squire laughed, and said you would have to steal the goose off o' the spit in his kitchen next Sunday, and he'd see about it."

Narrator 4: Jack's father said, expecting that would be the end of it, but jack replied,

Jack: "Oh! That won't be hard, any way."

Narrator 1: Next Sunday, after the people came from early Mass, the squire and all his people were in the kitchen, and the goose turning before the fire. The kitchen door opened, and Jack, disguised as a miserable old beggar man with a big wallet on his back, put in his head and asked the squire,

Jack: "Would the mistress have anything for me when dinner is over, your honour?"

Squire: "To be sure. We have no room here for you just now; sit in the porch for a while."

Narrator 2: the squire said to the beggar, who quickly replied,

Jack: "God bless your honour's family, and yourself!"

Narrator 3: Soon some one that was sitting near the window cried out,

Voice 1: "Oh, sir, there's a big hare scampering like the devil round the lawn. Will we run out and pin him?"

Squire: "Pin a hare indeed ! much chance you'd have; sit where you are."

Narrator 4: said the squire. That hare made his escape into the garden, but Jack that was in the beggar's clothes soon let another out of the bag.

Voice 2: "Oh, master, there he is still pegging round. He can't make his escape: let us have a chase. The hall door is locked on the inside, and Mr. Jack can't get in."

Narrator 1: said another another, and the squire responded a bit piqued,

Squire: "Stay quiet, I tell you."

Narrator 2: In a few minutes a shout came again that the hare was there still, but it was the third that Jack had given its liberty. Well, by the laws, they couldn't be kept in any longer. Out pegged every mother's son of them, and the squire after them.

Jack: "Will I turn the spit, your honour, while they're catching the hare?"

Narrator 3: says Jack, still in disguise as a beggar. The squire says to him

Squire: "Do, and don't let any one in for your life."

Jack: "Faith, an' I won't, you may depend on it."

Narrator 4: The third hare got away after the others, and when they all came back from the hunt, there was neither beggar nor goose in the kitchen. Smiling to himself, the squire says out loud, realizing what has happened,

Squire: "Luck to you, Jack; you've beat me this time."

Narrator 1: Well, while they were thinking of making up another dinner, a messenger came from Jack's father to beg that the squire, and the mistress, and the young lady would step across the fields, and take share of what luck had sent them.

Narrator 2: There was no dirty mean pride about the family, and they walked over, and

got a dinner with roast turkey, and roast beef, and their own roast goose; and the squire had like to burst his waistcoat with laughing at the trick, and Jack's good clothes and good manners did not take away any liking the young lady had for him already.

Narrator 3: While they were taking their punch at the old oak table in the nice clean little parlour with the sanded floor, says the squire,

Squire: "You can't be sure of my daughter, Jack, unless you steal away my six horses from under the six men that will be watching them to-morrow night in the stable."

Jack: "I'll do more than that,"

Narrator 4: says Jack,

Jack: "for a pleasant look from the young lady."

Narrator 1: and the young lady's cheeks turned as red as fire as she blushed. Monday night the six horses were in their stalls, and a man on every horse, and a good glass of drink under every man's waistcoat, and the door was left wide open for Jack. They were merry enough for a long time, and joked and sung, and were pitying the poor fellow. But the small hours crept on, and the whisky lost its power, and they began to shiver and wish it was morning. A miserable old woman, with half a dozen bags round her, and a beard half an inch long on her chin came to the door.

Jack: (in a high, old-womanish voice) "Ah, then, tender-hearted Christians,"

Narrator 2: says she, who was really Jack in yet another disguise,

Jack: "would you let me in, and allow me a wisp of straw in the corner ; the life will be froze out of me, if you don't give me shelter."

Narrator 3: Well, they didn't see any harm in that, and she made herself as snug as she could, and they soon saw her pull out a big black bottle, and take a sip. She coughed and smacked her lips, and seemed a little more comfortable, and the men couldn't take their eyes off her.

Jack: "By Gosh,"

Narrator 4: says Jack in his best Old Woman voice,

Jack: "I'd offer you a drop of this, only you might think it too free-making."

Man 1: "Oh, hang all impedent pride,"

Narrator 1: says one of the men,

Man 1: "we'll take it, and thankee."

Narrator 2: So she gave them the bottle, and they passed it round, and the last man had the manners to leave half a glass in the bottom for the old woman. They all thanked her, and said it was the best drop ever passed their tongue.

Jack: "In truth, it's myself that's glad to show how I value your kindness in giving me shelter; I'm not without another bottle and you may pass it round while myself finishes what the descent man left me."

Narrator 3: says Jack. Well, what they drank out of the other bottle only gave them a relish for more, and by the time the last man got to the bottom, the first man was dead asleep in the saddle, for the second bottle had a sleeping potion mixed with the whisky. The beggar woman lifted each man down, and laid him in the manger, or under the manger, snug and comfortable, drew a stocking over every horse's hoof, and led them away without any noise to one of Jack's father's out-houses.

Narrator 4: The first thing the squire saw next morning was Jack riding up the avenue, and five horses stepping after the one he rode. He yells out to Jack,

Squire: "Confound you, Jack! And confound the numskulls that let you outwit them!"

Narrator 1: He went out to the stable, and didn't the poor fellows look very ashamed o' themselves, when they could be woke up in earnest !

Squire: "After all,"

Narrator 2: says the squire, when they were sitting at breakfast,

Squire: "it was no great thing to outwit such ninny-hammers. I'll be riding out on the common from one to three today, and if you can outwit me of the beast I'll be riding, I'll say you deserve to be my son-in-law."

Jack: "I'd do more than that, for the honour, if there was no love at all in the matter,"

Narrator 3: says Jack, and the young lady held up her saucer before her face.

Narrator 4: Well, the squire kept riding about and riding about till he was tired, and no sign of Jack. He was thinking of going home at last, when what should he see but one of his servants running from the house as if he was mad.

Man 2: "Oh master, master,"

Narrator 1: says he, as far as he could be heard,

Man 2: "fly home if you wish to see the poor mistress alive! I'm running for the surgeon. She fell down two flights of stairs, and her neck, or her hips, or both her arms are broke, and she's speechless, and it's a mercy if you find the breath in her. Fly as fast as the beast will carry you."

Squire: "But hadn't you better take the horse? It's a mile and a half to the surgeon's."

Narrator 2: the squire asks of his servant.

Man 2: "Oh, anything you like, master. Oh, me, oh my,"

Narrator 3: he mourned, woefully, over and over.

Squire: "Here, stop your noise, and be off like wildfire! Oh, my darling, my darling, isn't this a trial?"

Narrator 4: cries the squire. He tore home like a fury, and wondered to see no stir outside, and when he flew into the hall, and from that to the parlour, his wife and daughter that were sewing at the table screeched out at the rush

he made, and the wild look that was on his face.

Squire: "Oh, my darling!"

Narrator 1: said he, when he could speak,

Squire: "how's this? Are you hurt? Didn't you fall down the stairs? What happened at all? Tell me!"

Mistress: "Why, nothing at all happened, thank God, since you rode out ; where did you leave the horse ?"

Narrator 2: Well, no one could describe the state the squire was in for about a quarter of an hour, between joy for his wife and anger with Jack, and shame for being tricked. He saw the beast coming up the avenue, and a young man in the saddle with his feet in the stirrup leathers. The servant didn't make his appearance for a week; but what did he care with Jack's ten golden guineas in his pocket.

Narrator 3: Jack didn't show his nose till next morning, and it was a queer reception he met.

Squire: "That was all foul play you gave,"

Narrator 4: says the squire.

Squire: "I'll never forgive you for the shock you gave me. But then I am so happy ever since, that I think I'll give you only one trial more. If you will take away the sheet from under my wife and myself to-night, the marriage may take place to-morrow."

Jack: "We'll try,"

Narrator 1: says Jack, taking up the challenge

Jack: "but if you keep my bride from me any longer, I'd steal her away if she was minded by fiery dragons."

Narrator 2: When the squire and his wife were in bed, and the moon shining in through the window, the squire saw a head rising over the sill to have a peep, and then bobbing down again.

Squire: "That's Jack,"

Narrator 3: says the squire to his wife.

Squire: "I'll astonish him a bit,"

Narrator 4: and with that he pointed a gun at the lower window pane.

Mistress: "Oh Lord, my dear!"

Narrator 1: says the wife,

Mistress: "Sure, you wouldn't shoot the brave fellow?"

Squire: "Indeed, an' I wouldn't for a kingdom; there's nothing but powder in it."

Narrator 2: Up went the head, bang went the gun, down dropped the body, and a great thump was heard on the gravel walk.

Mistress: "Oh, Lord,"

Narrator 3: cries the Squires frightened wife,

Mistress: "Poor Jack is killed or disabled for life."

Squire: "I hope not."

Narrator 4: says the squire, and down the stairs he ran. He never minded to shut the door, but opened the gate and ran into the garden. His wife heard his voice at the room door, before he could be under the window and back, as she thought.

Jack: "Wife, wife,"

Narrator 1: says the voice from the door, which was, of course, Jack, using his best imitation.

Jack: "The sheet, the sheet! He is not killed, I hope, but he is bleeding like a pig. I must wipe it away as well as I can, and get someone to carry him in with me."

Narrator 2: She pulled the sheet off the bed, and threw it to him. Down he ran like lightning, and he had hardly time to be in the garden, when he was back, and this time he came back in his shirt, as he went out.

Squire: "High hanging to you, Jack,"

Narrator 3: says the squire loudly,

Squire: "for being such a rogue!"

Mistress: "A Rogue, you say?"

Narrator 4: says his wife,

Mistress: "Isn't the poor fellow all cut and bruised?"

Squire: "I didn't much care if he was. What do you think was bobbing up and down at the window, and thumped down so heavy on the walk? A man's clothes stuffed with straw, and a couple of stones, it was."

Narrator 1: the squire huffed and puffed, and his wife then asked him,

Mistress: "And what did you want with the sheet just now, to wipe his blood if he was only a man of straw?"

Squire: "Sheet, woman! I wanted no sheet!"

Narrator 2: shouted the squire.

Mistress: "Well, whether you wanted it or not, I threw it to you, and you standing outside o' the door."

Squire: "Oh, Jack, Jack, you terrible tinker!"

Narrator 3: moaned the squire, falling heavily to his bed.

Squire: "There's no putting you off. We must do without the sheet for one night. We'll

have the marriage tomorrow to get ourselves out of trouble."

Narrator 4: So married they were, Jack and the Squire's daughter, and Jack turned out to be a real good husband. And the squire and his lady were never tired of praising their son-in-law, "Jack the Cunning Thief."

Vocabulary:	eldest	industrious	snare	hinder	contempt	cowed	gruffly
	journeyman	brogue	sapling	hedge	shawl	unknownst	wether
	corpse	bullock	strife	droll	spit	waller	piqued
	liberty	waistcoat	relish	mad	stirrup	guinea	minded
	rogue	tinker					

Scripted by Richard Swallow