

A CREATIVE APPROACH TO THE CLASSICAL PROGYMNASMATA

Writing Rhetoric

THESIS PART 1

PAUL KORTEPETER



Writing & Rhetoric Book 10: Thesis Part 1

© Classical Academic Press®, 2019

Version 1.0

ISBN: 978-1-60051-377-0

All rights reserved. This publication may not be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
without the prior written permission of Classical Academic Press.

All scripture is taken from THE HOLY BIBLE: NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®.
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture quoted by permission.

Classical Academic Press
515 S. 32nd Street
Camp Hill, PA 17011
www.ClassicalAcademicPress.com

Series content editor: Christine Perrin

Series editor: Gretchen Nesbit

Illustrations: Katharina Drees

Book design: Lenora Riley



Lesson 1

Quintilian and the Classical Ideal: First Strive for Goodness

Rhetoric is the art of writing and speaking persuasively. Having mastery of rhetoric is like having a superpower. It may not be as dramatic as bulletproof skin or a Jedi mind trick, but it will help you to influence how some people think and how other people act. Of course, that influence can be a good thing or a bad thing, depending on who's using it.

One of the earliest philosophers of rhetoric, Aristotle (384–322 BC), recognized that rhetorical powers could be useful for defending truth and justice in public discussions. He also believed that a master rhetorician could persuade difficult audiences to believe his arguments by appealing to his own good character and by stirring up emotions. Old Aristotle believed so strongly in the usefulness of rhetoric that he wrote an instruction manual about how to become a rhetorical master and dubbed it—you guessed it—*Rhetoric*.

At the same time, Aristotle acknowledged that some people might use rhetorical powers to harm and manipulate others. “One who uses such power of speech unjustly might do great harm . . . ,” he declared.¹ However, he added that any good thing—strength or health, wealth or leadership—can also be used for evil purposes. Although these things can be abused, Aristotle

1. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, The Internet Classics Archive, accessed January 19, 2018, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/rhetoric.1.i.html>.

asserts that individuals “can confer the greatest of benefits by a right use of these.”² As the Romans used to say, “*Abusus non tollit usum*”: The abuse of something is not an argument against its proper use. Indeed, Aristotle believed that, even though rhetoric could be abused and misused, mastering the art of rhetoric was very important. He said, “It is absurd to hold that a man ought to be ashamed of being unable to defend himself with his limbs, but not of being unable to defend himself with speech and reason.”³

In other words, people should value the ability to defend themselves with rhetoric just as much as they value the ability to use their arms and legs to fend off a physical attack.

Flash forward a few hundred years after Aristotle to the first-century Roman Empire. It was then that one of the greatest teachers of all time, Quintilian, trained his students to be top-notch persuaders. He believed that the best thing any school could do for a young person was to make him an amazing orator. Like Aristotle, Quintilian thought it was absurd for anyone to give up using rhetoric simply because it could be misused. He joked, “Let us give up eating, it often makes us ill; let us never go inside houses, for sometimes they collapse on their occupants; let never a sword be forged for a soldier, since it might be used by a robber.”⁴ Rather, Quintilian said it was a useful and worthwhile task

for a good [person] to defend his friends, to guide the senate by his counsels, and to lead peoples or armies to follow his bidding. . . . Is it not a noble thing, by employing the understanding which is common to mankind and the words that are



▲ The dark side: Rhetoric can be misused.

Mansudae Grand Monument, April 29, 2010. Image courtesy of John Pavelka, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mansudae_Grand_Monument_\(4610364189\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mansudae_Grand_Monument_(4610364189).jpg).



2. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*.

3. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*.

4. Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory*, trans. Harold Edgeworth Butler (Loeb Classical Library, 1920–1922), bk. 2, chap. 16, http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Quintilian/Institutio_Oratoria/home.html.

used by all, to win such honor and glory that you seem not to speak or plead, but rather, as was said of Pericles,⁵ to thunder and lighten?⁶

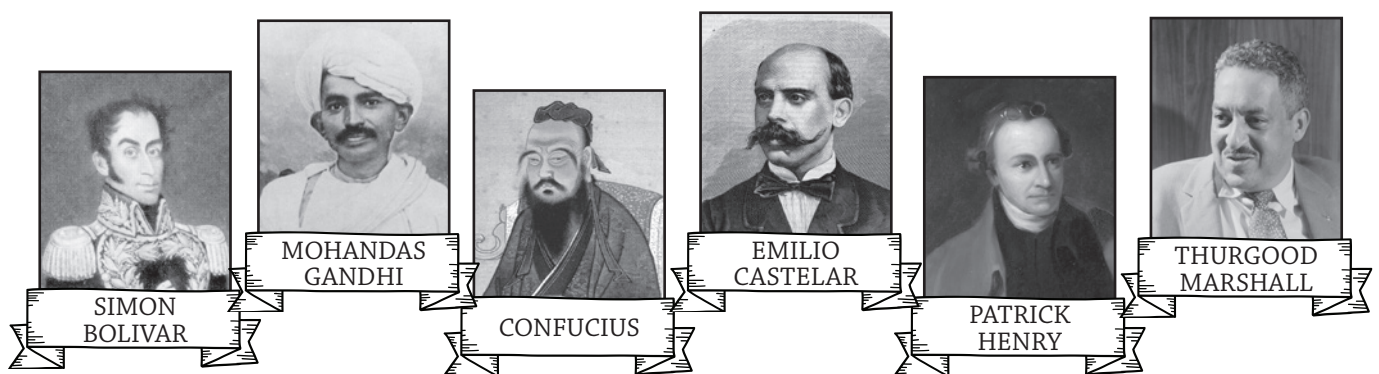
Note that different cultures and people groups have differing ideas about what it means to be good. The Roman idea of goodness, as explained by Quintilian, emphasizes some slightly different aspects of goodness than some of the world's great religions. For instance, Judaism and Christianity emphasize selflessness and charity in addition to the virtues that Quintilian thought of as goodness.

Wow. Quintilian implies that with rhetoric our words can be as powerful as thunder and lightning! But don't miss that he said that rhetoric was good when it was used by "a good person." Without mincing words, he says, "I hold that no one can be a true orator unless he is also a good [person]."⁷

What did Quintilian mean by "a good person"? More than likely he meant someone who worked to develop within herself the solid Roman virtues of courage, self-control, generosity, justice, piety, and wisdom. There are many different opinions about what makes a person good, but the bottom line is that Quintilian felt it was important to use rhetoric for the good of others.

When a person who strives for goodness writes or speaks, rhetoric can become a significant power to bring about good ends. What about you? Do you strive for goodness?

More than likely you'll say "yes," and you probably already have many qualities that are good. Yet developing goodness doesn't happen all at once. It is the study of a lifetime, and a young person such as yourself may have a lot of learning and growing left to do when it comes to goodness. In fact, too often people think that they are better than they really are, and that misbelief can get in the way of developing goodness. A professor at Princeton University asked his students what their position on slavery would have been if they had been white and living in the South before abolition. Guess what? According to this professor, the students all claimed they would have been abolitionists!



5. Pericles (c. 495–429): the renowned statesman and leader of Athens during its Golden Age

6. Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory*, bk. 2, chap. 16.

7. Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory*, bk. 1, chap. 2.

They all would have bravely spoken out against slavery, and worked tirelessly in the cause of freeing those enslaved. . . .

Of course, it is complete nonsense. Only the tiniest fraction of them, or of any of us, would have spoken up against slavery or lifted a finger to free the slaves. Most of them—and us—would simply have gone along. Many would have supported the slave system and, if it was in their interest, participated in it as buyers and owners or sellers of slaves.

So I respond to the students' assurances that they would have been vocal opponents of slavery by saying that I will credit their claims if they can show me evidence of the following: that in leading their lives today they have embraced causes that are unpopular among their peers and stood up for the rights of victims of injustice whose very humanity is denied, and where they have done so knowing (1) that it would make THEM unpopular with their peers, (2) that they would be loathed and ridiculed by wealthy, powerful, and influential individuals and institutions in our society, (3) that it would cost them friendships and cause them to be abandoned and even denounced by many of their friends, (4) that they would be called nasty names, and (5) that they would possibly even be denied valuable educational and professional opportunities as a result of their moral witness.

In short, my challenge to them is to show me where they have at significant risk to themselves and their futures stood up for a cause that is unpopular in elite sectors of our culture today.⁸

To put it bluntly, very few people would actually risk their popularity, their money, their friendships, their education, or their opportunities in order to take an unpopular stand. In other words, we often are not as good as we think we are, and recognizing this should motivate us to keep working at developing goodness. Taking an unpopular stand requires serious courage and other virtues as well: determination, for instance, and sound judgment and prudence. Just as mastering rhetoric takes time and practice, so does developing those virtues. It is more of a journey than an arrival.

No one ever becomes perfectly good and has nothing left to work on. You must constantly, deliberately own up to your weaknesses and actively support what is noble and right. In this way, your life will be held up to an honest mirror similar to the one in the story of Snow White. You may say, "Mirror, mirror on the wall, am I improving after all?" And the mirror may say back, "Oh, Man (or Oh, Woman), in this life you won't arrive; the vital thing is that you strive." Or it might dispense with the rhyme and tell you bluntly, "You were really kind to that elderly woman yesterday, but then afterward you bragged about it to your friends. Let's work on a little humility now." Throughout all your days, your mirror will keep saying, "You can still improve," but perhaps you

8. Robert P. George, Facebook, August 17, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/robert.p.george.39/posts/10212810047458661>. Used by permission of the author.

can also say back to it, “You’re right. I’m not yet perfectly good. I still have room to grow, but I am living well along the way.”

One of the purposes of these books, these *progymnasmata*, is to give you the tools for influencing others—for example, to stand up for what you believe in. When the time comes for you to take a stand, you will need to be able to express yourself clearly in writing or speech. The thesis essay is really the highest height of the *progymnasmata* because it can marshal every skill that came before it to make the strongest case for your ideas. You’ve made the climb and you’ve reached the pinnacle! But please remember: While you are learning to master rhetoric, to influence others, you must also strive to develop goodness, so that your influence is used for the good of others.

Narcissism

Nowadays it seems as though there are a lot of young people who are obsessed with their images—posting a bazillion selfies online; fixating on diet, clothes, celebrities; snapping photos back and forth. While it’s not necessarily bad to take selfies or think about how you look, being obsessed with doing those things can lead to excessive self-love, which is also known as narcissism. Narcissism can lead people to believe that they are better than they really are, that they don’t need to strive to improve. A professor of psychology in California recently surveyed thousands of students and found that 30 percent were narcissistic, a 15 percent leap from 1982!⁹ This rapid growth in narcissism among young people is a cause for concern for the health of our American culture.

Most people like to see themselves in the best possible light, and that’s perfectly natural. However, we must be on guard against thinking we are good (and special and remarkable) without questioning whether or not this assessment is based on reality. We must be on guard against the kind of thinking that leads us to use powerful tools such as rhetoric for our own selfish purposes, such as winning admiration or building power, rather than for the good of others. By working to develop the qualities of goodness, we can help ourselves to avoid the pitfalls of narcissistic thinking.



9. Jean M. Twenge and Joshua D. Foster, “Birth Cohort Increases in Narcissistic Personality Traits Among American College Students, 1982–2009,” *Psychology Today*, accessed June 8, 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/files/attachments/4330/npitimeupdatespps.pdf>.

Tell It Back—Summary



This icon points to more tips on summarizing at the back of the book.

Summarize aloud three or four important ideas in this lesson. Then, in the space provided, write one well-crafted sentence that tells the main idea of the lesson as best as you understand it. To arrive at the main idea, ask yourself, “What is the chief purpose of the lesson?”

Main idea:

Talk About It—

1. Anne Shirley of *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery asks the question, “Which would you rather be if you had the choice—divinely beautiful or dazzlingly clever or angelically good?” If you had to choose one of those qualities, which would it be and why? Why do teachers of rhetoric care about whether or not a person wants to be good?

2. The word “narcissism” means “excessive self-love.” The word is derived from a Greek myth about a handsome young man named Narcissus who rudely rejected all of his suitors, including the mountain nymph Echo. As punishment for his conceit, he was fated to fall in love with his own reflection on the surface of a pond. There he lay on the grassy bank, staring into his own two eyes, pining to embrace himself, until he withered away and died. Rhetoricians say that people must desire goodness and be concerned for the good of others. How does narcissism undermine the goodness demanded by the practice of rhetoric? What do you think happens to friendships and other important relationships in the life of a person who is a narcissist?



▲ *Echo and Narcissus* by John William Waterhouse

3. Can you think of a situation or issue today in which it would be very costly to an individual if he or she were to take an unpopular stand?

Write & Discuss—

We find the following reflection in the Jewish book of moral teachings entitled *Chapters of the Fathers*, or *Pirkei Avot*:

Who is wise?

He who learns from everyone.

Who is strong?

He who conquers himself.

Who is rich?

He who is content with his lot.

Who is honorable?

He who treats all men honorably.¹⁰



Throughout the ages, rhetoric has demanded that its practitioners be people who strive after goodness. The *Pirkei Avot* contains some universal ideas defining goodness in human beings: wisdom, self-control, contentment, and honor.

What would you say are the qualities of a good person? Think carefully about an individual from history or from your own experience whom you respect and admire. Then take fifteen minutes to write down your thoughts about the qualities of goodness and how those qualities are expressed in that particular person. After that, share your thoughts with your teacher or with a partner, and try to arrive at a description of a person who strives for goodness—the kind of person who would use the skills of rhetoric for good purposes. Write your description in the space provided.

Observations of the individual:

10. The words of Simon Ben Zoma from *Pirkei Avot*, chapter 4. The full text of this book can be found at https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/680274/jewish/Pirkei-Avot-Ethics-of-the-Fathers.htm.

Description of a person who strives for goodness:

Go Deeper—



1. **SUMMARY, MAIN IDEA, AND DEFINITION**—One of the fascinating things about folktales and fairy tales is that they entertain us at the same time that they teach us lessons about life. We learn to avoid talking to strangers from “Little Red Riding Hood.” We learn not to make rash promises from “Rumpelstiltskin.” We learn that looks can be deceiving from “Beauty and the Beast.” We learn that it’s important to use our wits from “Hansel and Gretel.”

Perhaps even more important than these moral lessons, which are similar to the lessons taught by fables, is the clear picture of good and evil that we get from many folk- and fairy tales. We know pretty quickly which characters are decent and kind, and we know which characters are harmful. This clear picture of good and evil—along with the way good characters are rewarded—helps children tilt toward wanting to live a good life.

Look at the following short tales. For each one, summarize the tale, as instructed, in the space provided. Then identify and write down the tale’s main idea and describe how each tale defines goodness or wickedness. (Keep in mind that most narratives are subject to interpretation and there may be more than one suitable main idea or definition of goodness or wickedness. If you compare your answer with the answers of your classmates, you may be surprised by the variety of perspectives.)

Summary vs. Main Idea—What’s the Difference?

A summary is a shortened, condensed version of a piece of writing. The main idea is the most important thought that comes out of the writing. For example, look at the following summary and main idea for “The Tortoise and the Hare”:

Summary: In a race between a slow-moving tortoise and a fast-running hare, the tortoise crosses the finish line first by persevering toward the goal.

Main idea: Success depends on persistence.

Example:

“Odds and Ends,” a German Tale

There was once upon a time a maiden who was pretty, but idle and negligent. When she had to spin she was so out of temper that if there was a little knot in the flax, she at once pulled out a whole heap of it, and strewed it about on the ground beside her. Now she had a servant who was industrious, and gathered together the bits of flax which were thrown away, cleaned them, [spun] them fine, and had a beautiful gown made out of them for herself. A young man had wooed the lazy girl, and the wedding was to take place. On the eve of the wedding, the industrious one was dancing merrily about in her pretty dress, and the bride said,—“Ah, how that girl does jump about, dressed in my odds and ends.” The bridegroom heard that, and asked the bride what she meant by it. Then she told him that the girl was wearing a dress [made] of the flax which she had thrown away. When the bridegroom heard that, and saw how idle she was, and how industrious the poor girl was, he gave her up and went to the other, and chose her as his wife.¹¹

Tip: Use quotation marks to punctuate the title of a short story, short poem, TV episode, or essay. Italicize or underline the title of a longer work, such as a book, movie, play, TV show, or collection of poems, stories, or essays.

- a. Summarize the tale “Odds and Ends” in one sentence.

In “Odds and Ends,” a bridegroom nearly marries a spoiled, lazy maiden, but marries her servant instead when he discovers that the hardworking servant made a dress out of discarded flax.

- b. State the main idea of the tale in one sentence.

Hard work and thrift, rather than beauty and idleness, receive a reward.

- c. How does the tale define goodness?

“Odds and Ends” defines goodness as working hard and making the best of your situation in life.

A. “The Star-Money,” a German Tale

There was once on a time a little girl whose father and mother were dead, and she was so poor that she no longer had any little room to live in, or bed to sleep in, and at last she had nothing else but the clothes she was wearing and a little bit of bread in her hand which some charitable soul had given her. She was, however, good and pious.

And as she was thus forsaken by all the world, she went forth into the open country, trusting in the good God. Then a poor man met her, who said, “Ah, give me something to eat, I am so hungry!” She reached him the whole of her piece of bread, and

11. The Brothers Grimm, “Odds and Ends,” in *Household Tales*, trans. Margaret Hunt (London: George Bell and Sons, 1884; Project Gutenberg, 2004), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5314/5314-8.txt>.

said, "May God bless it to thy use," and went onwards. Then came a child who moaned and said, "My head is so cold, give me something to cover it with." So she took off her hood and gave it to him; and when she had walked a little farther, she met another child who had no jacket and was frozen with cold. Then she gave it her own; and a little farther on one begged for a frock, and she gave away that also. At length she got into a forest and it had already become dark, and there came yet another child, and asked for a little shirt, and the good little girl thought to herself, "It is a dark night and no one sees thee, thou canst very well give thy little shirt away," and took it off, and gave away that also.

And as she so stood, and had not one single thing left, suddenly some stars from heaven fell down, and they were nothing else but hard smooth pieces of money, and although she had just given her little shirt away, she had a new one which was of the very finest linen. Then she gathered together the money into this, and was rich all the days of her life.¹²

a. Summarize the tale "The Star-Money" in one sentence.

b. State the main idea of the tale in one sentence.

c. How does the tale define goodness?

B. **"How the Wicked Sons Were Duped," an Indian Tale**

A very wealthy old man, imagining that he was on the point of death, sent for his sons and divided his property among them. However, he did not die for several years afterwards; and miserable years many of them were. Besides the weariness of old age, the old fellow had to bear with much abuse and cruelty from his sons. Wretched, selfish ingrates! Previously they vied with one another in trying to please their father, hoping thus to receive more money, but now they had received their patrimony,¹³ they cared

12. The Brothers Grimm, "The Star-Money," in *Household Tales*, trans. Margaret Hunt (London: George Bell and Sons, 1884; Project Gutenberg, 2004), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5314/5314-8.txt>.

13. patrimony: inheritance from one's father

not how soon he left them—nay, the sooner the better, because he was only a needless trouble and expense. And they let the poor old man know what they felt.

One day he met a friend and related to him all his troubles. The friend sympathized very much with him, and promised to think over the matter, and call in a little while and tell him what to do. He did so; in a few days he visited the old man and put down four bags full of stones and gravel before him.

“Look here, friend,” said he. “Your sons will get to know of my coming here to-day, and will inquire about it. You must pretend that I came to discharge a long-standing debt with you, and that you are several thousands of rupees¹⁴ richer than you thought you were. Keep these bags in your own hands, and on no account let your sons get to them as long as you are alive. You will soon find them change their conduct towards you. Salaam.¹⁵ I will come again soon to see how you are getting on.”

When the young men got to hear of this further increase of wealth they began to be more attentive and pleasing to their father than ever before. And thus they continued to the day of the old man’s demise, when the bags were greedily opened, and found to contain only stones and gravel!¹⁶

a. Summarize the tale “How the Wicked Sons Were Duped” in three sentences.

b. State the main idea of the tale in one sentence.

c. How does the tale define wickedness?

14. rupee: the basic money unit of India, Pakistan, and Nepal

15. Salaam: a greeting and farewell that means “peace”

16. “How the Wicked Sons Were Duped,” in *Indian Fairy Tales*, ed. Joseph Jacobs (London: David Nutt, 1892; Project Gutenberg, 2003), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7128/7128-h/7128-h.htm>.

C. **“The Old Man and His Grandson,” a German Tale**

There was once a very old man, whose eyes had become dim, his ears dull of hearing, his knees trembled, and when he sat at table he could hardly hold the spoon, and spilt the broth upon the table-cloth or let it run out of his mouth. His son and his son’s wife were disgusted at this, so the old grandfather at last had to sit in the corner behind the stove, and they gave him his food in an earthenware bowl, and not even enough of it. And he used to look towards the table with his eyes full of tears. Once, too, his trembling hands could not hold the bowl, and it fell to the ground and broke. The young wife scolded him, but he said nothing and only sighed. Then they bought him a wooden bowl for a few pennies, out of which he had to eat.

They were once sitting thus when the little grandson of four years old began to gather together some bits of wood upon the ground. “What are you doing there?” asked the father. “I am making a little trough,” answered the child, “for father and mother to eat out of when I am big.”

The man and his wife looked at each other for a while, and presently began to cry. Then they took the old grandfather to the table, and henceforth always let him eat with them, and likewise said nothing if he did spill a little of anything.¹⁷

a. Summarize the tale “The Old Man and His Grandson” in three sentences.

b. State the main idea of the tale in one sentence.

c. How does the tale define goodness?

17. The Brothers Grimm, “The Old Man and His Grandson,” in *Household Tales*, trans. Margaret Hunt (London: George Bell and Sons, 1884; Project Gutenberg, 2004), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5314/5314-8.txt>.

D. **“The Miraculous Cow,” a Filipino Tale**

There was once a farmer driving home from his farm in his cart. He had tied his cow to the back, as he was accustomed to do every evening on his way home. While he was going along the road, two boys saw him. They were Felipe and Ambrosio. Felipe whispered to Ambrosio, “Do you see the cow tied to the back of that cart? Well, if you will untie it, I will take it to our house.”

Ambrosio approached the cart slowly, and untied the cow. He handed the rope to Felipe, and then tied himself in the place of the animal.

“Come on, Ambrosio! Don’t be foolish! Come on with me!” whispered Felipe impatiently.

“No, leave me alone! Go home, and I will soon be there!” answered the cunning Ambrosio.

After a while the farmer happened to look back. What a surprise for him! He was frightened to find a boy instead of his cow tied to the cart. “Why are you there? Where is my cow?” he shouted furiously. “Rascal, give me my cow!”

“Oh, don’t be angry with me!” said Ambrosio. “Wait a minute, and I will tell you my story. Once, when I was a small boy, my mother became very angry with me. She cursed me, and suddenly I was transformed into a cow; and now I am changed back into my own shape. It is not my fault that you bought me: I could not tell you not to do so, for I could not speak at the time. Now, generous farmer, please give me my freedom! for I am very anxious to see my old home again.”

The farmer did not know what to do, for he was very sorry to lose his cow. When he reached home, he told his wife the story. Now, his wife was a kind-hearted woman; so, after thinking a few minutes, she said, “Husband, what can we do? We ought to set him free. It is by the great mercy of God that he has been restored to his former self.”

So the wily boy got off. He rejoined his friend, and they had a good laugh over the two simple folks.

The next day the farmer went to the market to buy a new cow and found his own cow for sale. He grieved at his own foolishness and vowed to thrash the boys if he ever saw them again.¹⁸

a. Summarize the tale “The Miraculous Cow” in two sentences.

18. Adapted from “The Miraculous Cow,” in *Filipino Popular Tales*, ed. Dean S. Fansler (Lancaster, PA: American Folklore Society, 1921; Project Gutenberg, 2008), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/8299/8299-h/8299-h.htm>.

b. State the main idea of the tale in one sentence.

c. How does the tale define wickedness?

2. **AMPLIFICATION**—When we give readers a chance to enter more fully into an experience, they often become more open to our ideas. Amplification can do exactly that—help readers enter into an experience—by making a story richer with detail. Good rhetoric requires good storytelling.

The story in this exercise is a tale from China that warns the reader to treat people kindly, to protect them, and to avoid assuming the worst about them. You will see that this story, like some of the tales in the previous exercise, teaches about goodness by showing what goodness is not—by describing wickedness in action. After you read it over, rewrite the story in the space provided, adding dialogue and description that would enhance your audience’s enjoyment of the story and help them to better understand what you think the story is saying about goodness.

- You can use vivid, descriptive words to:
 - more fully describe the farmers
 - more fully describe the settings of the field and the temple
 - more fully describe the storm
- You can go into more detail about the wicked background of the farmers or help your audience better understand the “mind” of the lightning.
- You can use dialogue to:
 - give more details about the actions and motives of the farmers
 - enhance the personality and character of several of the farmers



.....

• • • • •

•
•
•
•
•
•
•

•

•

•

•

•

•

.....



19. *The Chinese Fairy Book*, ed. Dr. R. Wilhelm, trans. Frederick H. Martens (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1921; Project Gutenberg, 2009), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/29939/29939-h/29939-h.htm>.

