

## Good Luck, Bad Luck

This is a traditional story from China. I understand that Robert Fisher has spotted it independently and that it is included in one of his books. Folk tales like this are rich sources for stimuli, because they tend to have spare writing and repetition, both elements that are helpful in fixing a story in the imagination.

### Warm up

Some sort of game of chance such as having two matching sets of cards. Each child has a card, you get someone to pick a card from the matching set, and the child with that card wins a (very) small gift. Then do Philosopher's Fruit Salad with these questions.

Was that child lucky?

Does it make them a lucky person?

Were the rest of you unlucky?

### Discussion - Themes and Questions

**Luck** – Is there such a thing as luck? Are some people luckier than others? Is luck just something we make up after things have happened? Where does luck come from? If somebody is bound to win, is the winner really lucky? Is there a difference between being lucky to win something and deserving to win it? Can you deserve to be lucky? If you thought you were lucky, would you be luckier? If you thought you were unlucky, would you be more unlucky?

**Uncertainty** – Can you ever be sure something is good luck? Does that mean you should be less happy when something good happens, and less unhappy when something bad happens?

**Knowledge of the future** – How did he know good luck would turn to bad? Why did he keep saying "Good luck, bad luck, who knows?"

**Age** – Did he know more because he was old? Does age bring wisdom?

**Conscription** – Should people have to fight in wars? One of those questions which might invite a cosy liberal consensus of "of course not" – in which case someone needs to play Devil's advocate and describe a scenario, historical or imagined, where it's more problematic. Or if the consensus is the other way, what about people in countries run by bad people? Should they be forced to fight? It's an opportunity for people to reflect on their intuitions and come to a deeper understanding of them, or change their minds.

**Wild animals** – Why did the wild horses belong to the old man? Can you own something that's wild? What's the difference between a wild and a tame animal? Is taming an animal stealing it from itself?

This is the story of an old Chinese farmer who lived many years ago.

He had one old horse that he used to plough his fields.

One day, the horse ran away into the hills.

Everyone said, "We are so sorry for your bad luck."

The old man replied, "Bad luck, good luck, who knows?"

A week later, the horse returned with a herd of wild horses, which now belonged to the old man.

Everyone said, "We are so happy for your good luck!"

The old man replied, "Good luck, bad luck, who knows?"

While his only son was riding one of the wild horses, he fell off and broke his leg.

Everyone said, "What bad luck!"

The old man replied, "Bad luck, good luck, who knows?"

One day, the army came to the village, and took all the strong young men to be soldiers for the emperor.

Only the old farmer's son was spared, because he could not fight with a broken leg.

Everyone said, "What good luck!"

The old man replied, "Good luck, bad luck, who knows?"