

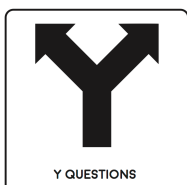
# The parallel parables of the talents

*The first story is an adaptation of the following passage from Matthew's Gospel 25:14-30. The second is an inversion of it. Using two versions of a story, or a story told from two points of view, is a good technique for bringing philosophical concepts to the fore.*



*Imagine you have a vast business empire, and you are always looking for new ways to make money. You are going on holiday for a few months, and so want to trust some of your money with your workers. You want to see what they can do with it to make the overall business even richer. How would you divide your money?*

This quick thought-experiment encourages pupils to consider a range of factors, for example ability, trust, entrepreneurship. Would they give more money to their senior advisors? It immediately puts them in the position of the rich man and calls into question his first action.



I would recommend reading the original parable first, and asking pupils whether the man was reasonable – in how he divided his money, and how he reacted on his return.

In the “split” version, I wanted to introduce concepts of risk and luck, whether the master was reasonable in his reactions and whether the same praise or blame would be deserved if the outcome was different. Does this outcome make the first man appear foolish?

How do they feel about the other, equally rich man? Was this fairer? Why?



The discussion will probably focus around risk and luck and will not need much scaffolding from you, either. However, if you do feel dialogue is stuttering, consider nudging things back towards these kinds of questions:

- When are risks worth taking?
- How should we respond to those who take risks, in comparison to those who don't?
- Should we react differently to risk takers based on the outcome?
- Can we control our own luck?

## NEXT STEPS

'The only strategy that is guaranteed to fail is not taking risks' – Mark Zuckerberg. JK Rowling has also talked about 'failing by default' if you live too cautiously. I've given these assemblies, and plastered my classroom door with similar quotes. Deep down though, I knew I was preaching something that isn't necessarily 100% accurate. But in a world where danger is nullified like never before, the lofty rhetoric may be needed.

Set a research task where pupils find risks that were worth taking, and those which weren't. Or is this only knowable through hindsight? Or they could rank quotes in an order based on accuracy / reality / wisdom.

A rich man decided to take a trip around the world in his yacht. He called three of his servants together and trusted them with his money while he was gone.

He trusted one with five million pounds, one with two million, and one with one million, according to how able they were.

When he returned, the servant with five million said, "Look! I traded oil with your money, and I've doubled it. Here's ten million!"

The servant with two million said, "Look! I used your money to buy shares, and I've doubled it. Here's four million!"

The servant with one million said, "I know you're a harsh man. You expect to make money even without working for it. So I thought you'd hit the roof if I invested your money and lost it. I was scared. I stuffed it into my mattress and slept on it for two years. Here's what is yours." And he gave the million back.

The rich man said to the first two, "Excellent! You can be in charge of my North American businesses. And you can run Europe. And have a Range Rover each!"

Then he turned to the third servant, who had slept on his money. "And as for you, you blithering idiot – you're fired!"

\* \* \*

Meanwhile, in another tall glassy building, an equally rich man had returned from a round the world trip. His servants had been looking after his money too.

The one who had been given five million said, "I bought and sold precious metals with your money. But it's been a bad year. Here's the two million I have left."

The one who had been given two million said, "I lent your money to an ice cream company. It rained all summer and they went bust. Here's the million I got back."

The one who had been given a million said, "I know you're a harsh man. You expect to make money even without working for it. So I thought you'd hit the roof if I invested your money and lost it. I was scared. I stuffed it into my mattress and slept on it for two years. Here's £999,910.01 back. I bought a new mattress."

The rich man said to the first two servants, "Imbeciles! You're fired!"

Then he turned to the third servant, who had slept on his money, "Bravo! You're my new apprentice! What colour Range Rover would you like?"