

## **The Gratitude Project: How long have examples of gratitude been in literature?**

*Connor McKenney & Diana Bollenbaugh*

“Thankfulness is the beginning of gratitude. Gratitude is the completion of thankfulness. Thankfulness may consist of merely words. Gratitude is shown in acts.” – Henri Frederic Amiel.

Popular literature and movies provide many examples of acts of gratitude, an example would be a former enemy joins forces with the hero in order to defeat evil. However, we find the simplicity of fables really illustrate this point quite well. In fact, one fable has proved to be so popular through out the ages, it has had multiple iterations. The most notable are: The Shepard and the Lion – Aesop (620-564 BCE), Androcles – Aulus Gellius (200 CE), Androcles and the Lion – George Bernard Shaw (1912), Andy and the Lion – James Daugherty (1938), Androcles and The Lion – Dennis Nolan (1997).

For those of you who may not know the core story throughout the ages, we have provided a brief synopsis: *A slave named Androcles escaped his owners. He made his way into the nearby forest. As he walked through the forest, he found a cave. He went in to hide and found a very large, dangerous looking lion that was in a lot of pain. He cautiously approached the lion and removed the thorn that was imbedded in its paw. The lion allowed him to stay in the cave and shared the results of its hunts with Androcles. After some time had passed, Androcles was arrested as a fugitive slave. He was sent to Rome and condemned to be devoured by wild animals. He was placed in the Arena and expected to die. Instead his friend, the Lion, is sent in and does not attack him. It saved him from the other animals. The emperor stopped the spectacle and asked Androcles why the lion would not harm him. Androcles explained his history with the Lion. The emperor freed both Androcles and the Lion in recognition of the power of their friendship.*

This story began as an oral tradition and the most ancient copy we have is from Aulus Gellius. His version references an even older written version of the story that has been lost to antiquity. Why has this story been so popular that it has been in popular culture in one form or another for the last 2,500 years? What makes it so compelling?

Homework: What’s your favorite example of gratitude in literature?

The next topic will discuss the career benefits of gratitude.