
Economic Literacy
for Children
Robinson's Island
BOOK 7
Tiko's Machine
The sequel to "Fish for Rainy Days"
Praxeologos
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AGES 6–10

PICTURE BOOK

Tiko's Machine

The sequel to "Fish for Rainy Days"

THE CHARACTERS

Robinson, a sailor who lives on an island and fishes with his net
Friday, a brave sailor and the best climber on the island
Zachary, the chatty green parrot with the red head
Malu, who makes clay jugs, and her daughter Lani, who weaves mats
Tiko, who builds boats and paddles
Kai, who carves fish hooks from bone
Roko, who weaves baskets

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The storm left big logs on the beach, and Tiko has an idea: a wheel that fishes by itself while everyone sleeps. But Robinson is worried: who will want his fish now?

Remember Tiko, looking at the logs and the stream and saying “I have an idea...”? This is his idea. The story is made up, but wheels like this are real: people still use them to catch fish in rivers.



A FEW DAYS LATER

Logs on the beach

A few days later, everything the storm broke has been mended, but its big logs are still lying on the beach. Tiko rolls them, one by one, down to where the stream runs into the sea. Then he picks up a stick and draws a big wheel in the sand, with spokes like a star and little baskets all the way round.

“What is it?” squawks Zachary from the top of the logs. “A machine,” says Tiko. “Something that does some of the work for you. This one will fish while we sleep!” Kai waves to him. “Nobody uses this spot,” he says. “If you build your wheel here, it will be yours.” “A wheel that fishes?” squawks Zachary. “I’ll believe it when I see it!”



DAY AFTER DAY

Many hands

Tiko can't build the wheel on his own, so he asks for help, and he pays for it. Friday carves the spokes with his stone axe. Roko sits on his rock and weaves six deep baskets to scoop up the fish. Robinson ties everything together with strong rope, knot by knot. And Tiko sets the wheel on two posts, right where the stream runs into the sea.

Every evening, Tiko pays his helpers in pink shells. "That machine hasn't caught a single fish yet," squawks Zachary, "and it has already given work to Friday, Roko and Robinson!"



ONE EVENING

The wheel turns

One evening, the friends come down to the stream to watch. Tiko pulls out the wooden peg that holds the wheel still. Creak... creak... The water pushes the baskets, and the wheel begins to turn all by itself.

As the sun goes down, little silver fish swim up the stream from the sea. The turning baskets scoop them up, lift them high and tip them into the big catch basket on the bank. Splash! “It works!” shouts Lani, and the friends cheer.



THE NEXT MORNING

Twelve fish!

The next morning, Zachary hops onto the rim of the catch basket and counts like a teacher: “Two, four, six… twelve! Twelve fish!” Tiko laughs. “It fished all night, and I slept!”

Tiko eats two fish for breakfast. Ten are left, far more than he can eat before they go bad. So he calls out across the beach: “Fresh fish! Two fish for one shell!” “Two for one?” says Lani. “Robinson’s fish are one shell each!”



LATER THAT MORNING

Robinson’s worry

Malu and Lani give Tiko one shell and take two fish home for lunch. Further along, Robinson casts his net, just as he always does: six fish! He lays them out on a big leaf and waits. But nobody comes. Everyone is at the wheel.

Robinson sits down on a rock. “Who will want my fish now, at one shell each?” he sighs. “My net is no use any more!” Zachary flaps his wings crossly. “That wheel is taking your work away!” he squawks. “Let’s break it!”



THAT EVENING, BY THE FIRE

Break the wheel?

That evening, they all sit around the fire and talk it over. “We can’t break the wheel,” says Friday. “It’s Tiko’s. He made it, just as Kai made his hut. Breaking it would be like taking it from him.” “Then let’s make a rule,” says Kai. “No wheels on the island!”

“A rule?” says Malu. “And who would make it? A chief? We tried that once.” Roko’s cheeks turn pink. “No chief, thank you!” he says, and everyone laughs. Then Lani thinks for a while. “But what has the wheel really changed?” she asks.



BY THE FIRE

Lani’s shell

“Mum and I eat two fish a day,” says Lani. “Before, they cost us two shells. Now they cost one. So every day we have one shell left over!” She holds it up in the firelight. “In two days we’ll have two, and I’ll give them to Roko for a little basket.”

“And after that, we’ll give our spare shells to Friday, for coconuts,” says Malu. “Then I’ll climb more palm trees,” says Friday. “And I’ll weave more baskets!” says Roko, rubbing his hands. Zachary’s eyes go round. “So the shells don’t disappear,” he squawks. “They just go to somebody else’s work!”



A LITTLE LATER

The wheel needs hands

“And who wove the wheel’s baskets?” asks Roko. “Me!” “Who carved its spokes?” asks Friday. “Me!” “And who tied it all together?” asks Lani, looking at Robinson. Robinson scratches his beard. “Me,” he says.

“The baskets wear out, and the ropes get loose in the water,” says Tiko. “The wheel will need new baskets from Roko and your knots every week, Robinson. And I’ll pay for them.” Zachary looks at the dark shape of the wheel by the stream. “So a machine needs people too!” he squawks.



LATE THAT NIGHT

What about me?

Late that night, Robinson still looks worried. “But I won’t need to fish all morning any more,” he says. “What will I do?” “Get your fish from the wheel, like everyone else,” says Tiko. “And help me! I can’t build boats fast enough.”

“Kai wants a boat to fish far out with his hooks. Friday wants a big canoe, big enough for all of us and lots of things to swap. You’re the best on the island at knots and rope. Will you build boats with me?” He smiles. “You can say no, thank you.” Robinson looks up at the stars for a long time. Then he grins. “Yes!”



IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOW

The big canoe

In the days that follow, Tiko and Robinson build the big canoe together. Tiko hollows out the biggest storm log and shapes the paddles. Robinson ties a long log to its side, so that the canoe won't tip over, and puts up the mast with his strongest knots. Roko weaves a sail from palm leaves, and Zachary checks every knot like an inspector. Friday pays them in shells and coconuts.

Some mornings, Robinson still wades into the sea with his net. The wheel only catches little fish, but the net brings in big ones too. "Big fish for a party!" says Lani. Somebody always wants those.



ONE AFTERNOON

More for everyone

One afternoon, Zachary flies high over the beach and looks down. There is more of everything than before: fish from the wheel on Malu's leaf, Lani's new little basket, a pile of Friday's coconuts, a big fish from Robinson's net, and a canoe that is almost ready. In Robinson's clay pot there are shells again, from his boat work.

"Nobody has less work," says Lani. "We just make more things!" Robinson pulls a knot tight and laughs. "A fisherman who builds boats! Who would have thought it?" And down by the stream, the wheel creaks round and round, catching tomorrow's breakfast.



AT SUNSET

The new canoe

At sunset, everyone pushes the new canoe into the sea together. It rocks, it settles… and it floats! “It floats!” squawks Zachary from the top of the mast. Then they have a party on the beach, with fish from the wheel, a big grilled fish from Robinson and Friday’s coconuts.

“So did the machine take our work away?” asks Zachary. “No,” says Robinson. “It gave us cheaper fish, and time to make new things.” Friday stands in the water and looks far out to sea, past the horizon. “Now we can sail to my island!” he says… but that’s another story.

The End

The Lesson

It's easy to see the work a machine does: Tiko's wheel caught the fish that Robinson used to catch. So Robinson was worried, and Zachary wanted to break it. It's harder to see what else the wheel brought.

Fish got cheaper, so there were shells left over for a basket from Roko and coconuts from Friday. The wheel needed hands to build it and mend it. And Robinson, who no longer had to fish all morning, built a big canoe. Nobody made a rule. Each of them chose what to do.

Machines don't leave us with nothing to do: they let us make more with the same work. When you hear that a machine will take people's work away, think of Tiko's wheel, and ask: what will people do with the time and the shells left over?

For grown-ups: sources and further reading

WHERE EACH PAGE COMES FROM

- **Page 1, “Logs on the beach”:** Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*, ch. XXX, ¶14
- **Page 2, “Many hands”:** Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, ch. 9, ¶17
- **Page 3, “The wheel turns”:** Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*, ch. XXX, ¶14
- **Page 4, “Twelve fish!”:** Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*, ch. VII, ¶18
- **Page 5, “Robinson’s worry”:** Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, ch. 9, ¶17
- **Page 6, “Break the wheel?”:** Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*, ch. VII, ¶18
- **Page 7, “Lani’s shell”:** Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*, ch. XXX, ¶14
- **Page 8, “The wheel needs hands”:** Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, ch. 9, ¶17
- **Page 9, “What about me?”:** Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*, ch. VII, ¶18
- **Page 10, “The big canoe”:** Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*, ch. XXX, ¶14
- **Page 11, “More for everyone”:** Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*, ch. VII, ¶18
- **Page 12, “The new canoe”:** Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*, ch. VII, ¶18 · Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*, ch. XXX, ¶14 · Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, ch. 9, ¶17
- **The Lesson:** Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*, ch. VII, ¶18 · Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*, ch. XXX, ¶14 · Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, ch. 9, ¶17

FURTHER READING

- Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*, ch. VII, “Human Labor as a Means”: why better methods of production don’t leave people with nothing to do (¶18).
- Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*, ch. XXX: tools and machinery as “means to increase output per unit of input” (¶14).
- Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, ch. 9: “How many workers have been ‘displaced’ because of the invention of the shovel?” (¶17).
- Henry Hazlitt, *Economics in One Lesson*, chapter “The Curse of Machinery”: why cheaper coats made by a machine leave people more to spend on other things.

NOTE

The pictures are illustrations for children, and the story is made up. Robinson and Friday are inspired by Daniel Defoe’s characters (1719); Zachary, Malu, Lani, Tiko, Kai and Roko are invented. Fishing wheels like Tiko’s are real. The story follows Ludwig von Mises, for whom tools and machinery are “means to increase output”, Murray N. Rothbard and his shovel, and Henry Hazlitt’s text “The Curse of Machinery”. The numbers are ours, so that children can count along easily.

THIS BOOK

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