



READING WITH INSIGHT

Q1. What is the moral issue that the story raises?

Ans: The story raises a moral issue—should parents always decide what the children should do or let the children do what they like to do. There is an evident contrast between an adult's perspective on life and the world view of a little child.

Jack, the father, defends the behaviour of Roger Skunk's mother who forced the old wizard to restore the natural but offensive smell to Roger Skunk. He sums up the issue in one sentence: 'She knew what was right'. As to why the little skunk agreed to her mother's proposal, Jack says that the little skunk loved his mommy more than he loved all the other little animals. Jack cites an instance. When Roger Skunk was in bed, Mommy Skunk came up, hugged him and said he smelled like her little baby Skunk again and she loved him very much.

Little Jo, the spokesperson of children, does not agree with her father's view. She feels that the Skunk's mother should not have robbed the pleasure of her little son and deprived him of the pleasant smell of the roses. She insisted that the wizard hit that mommy on the head and did not change that little skunk back. She calls the little skunk's mother "a stupid mommy". She realised that her father was defending his own mother to her, or something odd. Jo stuck to her view point. She insisted that her father should tell her the story the next day in a different manner. It was the wizard that took the magic wand and hit that mommy.

Q2. How does Jo want the story to end and why?

Ans: Jack ends the story in a way that seems unusual to Jo. In her dream world, the wizard is a miracle worker. She can't digest the statement that the little skunk's mother hit the wizard right on his head with her umbrella and he agreed to do what she desired. Roger Skunk did not smell of roses any more. He smelled very bad again.

Jo did not want the story to end this way. She had in mind, the pleasure of all the little animals. She says, "But daddy, then he said about the other little animals run away!" Her father admits it. He agrees that Roger Skunk told his mother, "But Mommy, all the other animals run away!" -The mother does not bother about them. She says bluntly, "I don't care. You smelled the way a little skunk should have."

Jo can't, digest the ending that the mother hit the wizard right over the head and he made Roger Skunk smell very bad again. She suggested to her father to end the story in another fnanner—"The wizard hit her on the head and did not change that little skunk back." She "" wanted that stupid mommy to be punished and insisted repeatedly on the changed ending next night till her father agreed to consider it, saying, "Well, we'll see."

Q3. Why does Jack insist that it was the wizard that was hit and not the mother?

Ans: Jack has the typical parental attitude. He is of the opinion that the parents know what is best for their children. He asserts the parental authority time and again to quieten Jo and stifle her objections and amendments to the story of the foul smelling Skunk

related by him.

He defends the attitude of Roger Skunk's mother. She does not approve of the unnatural, unskunk like smell that Roger has. She calls the sweet smell of the roses an awful smell. Earlier the little skunk smelled the way a little skunk should. She wants the natural characteristic—the foul smell—restored. He says that she knew what was right. Secondly, the little skunk loved his mommy more than he loved all the other animals. That is why, he took his mommy to the wizard. She hit the wizard and forced him to change the smell of roses to his earlier bad odour. He insisted on this ending to emphasise the concern of the parents for children and their role in bringing them up on proper lines. .

Q4. What makes Jack feel caught in an ugly middle position?

Ans: Jack feels that he has been caught in an ugly middle position physically, emotionally as well as mentally. The woodwork, a cage of mouldings and rails and skirting boards all around them was half old tan and half new ivory.

He was conscious of his duties as a father and as a husband. Little Bobby was already asleep. His efforts to make Jo fall asleep proved quite fatiguing. She kept on interrupting him, asking for clarifications, pointing errors and suggesting alternatives.

Jack did not like that women should take anything for granted. He liked them to be apprehensive. So, he extended the story, though he was in a haste to go down stairs and help his pregnant wife in her hard work of painting the woodwork. The result of the extension to the story proved unfruitful and unpleasant for Jo, Jack and Clare. Jo wanted him to change the ending of the story. Clare complained that he had told a long story. Jack felt utter weariness and did not want to speak with his wife or work with her or touch her. He was really caught in an ugly middle position.

Q5. What is your stance regarding the two endings to the Roger Skunk story?

Ans: Of the two endings to the Roger Skunk story, I approve of the mature and realistic one narrated by Jack that the mother skunk hit the wizard on the head and forced him to restore the original smell to the skunk.

Every species of animals has its special features. She wanted Roger Skunk to smell the 'way a little skunk should have. It should not carry the deceptive and borrowed smell of the roses. Roger Skunk is agreed to go with her because he loved his mommy more than he loved all the other little animals. She knew what was right.

The mother's point was proved right. When the wizard restored the original foul smell to Roger Skunk, the other little animals got used to the way he was and did not mind it at all.

Of course, it took them sometime. Jack did not agree with Joanne's remark that she was a 'stupid' mother. On the other hand, we find her a caring and 'Joving mother. When Roger Skunk was in bed, mommy skunk embraced him and said he smelled like her little baby skunk again and she loved him very much. Thus, Jack's version brings out the mother's love, care and concern for her little baby.

Q6. Why is an adult's perspective on life different from that of a child's?

Ans: An adult's perspective on life is different from that of a child's because of the difference between their respective experiences and exposure to the world around them. An adult comes across all sorts of experiences—good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, happy or sad, encouraging or discouraging. The child lives a sheltered life under the protection and love of his parents. In their rosy dream world of fairies and wizards, nothing good is impossible for their favourite characters. Their adoration of these characters is nothing short of hero-worship.

The world of make-believe makes the children lovers of romance,

beauty and all things pleasant in nature. These characters and their super feats, which appear so real in stories, may not be real at all in real life. The adults who are familiar with harsh realities of life know that all that glitters is not gold. Everything is not honey. They accept things critically— with a pinch of salt. Children usually lack this quality.

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