

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 5: SHOULD WIZARD HIT MOMMY



SHOULD WIZARD HIT MOMMY

~Summary~

-by John Updike

Theme of Jack's Story

Jack, Joanne's father, told her a story every evening, and it had now become almost a custom. Jack started narrating stories to Jo when she was just two years old. Over the years, he had started to run out of ideas. Every story was a variation of the basic tale: a small animal, usually named Roger, had some problem. He went to the wise owl, and the owl advised him to go to the wizard.

The wizard solved Roger's problem and asked for a fee. Roger didn't have the required amount, but the wizard told Roger where and how he could get the money. Roger found the money, paid the wizard, went home and had a lovely dinner with his family.

The Roger Skunk Story

It was a Saturday evening and time for Jo's usual naps. Jack asked Jo about the new lead in the story. Jo wanted it to be a 'Skunk'. Having a fresh hero momentarily stirred Jack to creative enthusiasm. Jack started narrating the Roger Skunk story.

Roger smelt very bad. Other creatures loathed him and would run away from him. They teased him by calling him 'Stinky Skunk'. So Roger felt very bad. He had no friends. Jo had not foreseen this and became upset.

Jack was happy to get an unexpected reaction from her, as his stories had now become much too predictable for Jo.

The Owl and Wizard Help Roger

While narrating the story, Jack heard a chair scrape downstairs. He realised he must go down to help Clare, his wife, paint the woodwork. Clare was pregnant. But he continued with the story.

Roger Skunk went to the wise old owl who lived at the top of a very big tree. The enormous owl advised Roger to visit the wizard.

At this point, Jo shot a question and looked at Jack. She asked if magic spells were real. Her inquisitive behaviour had begun a month ago. She had started asking questions like whether spiders really ate bugs and if God was present everywhere, and so on.

Jack didn't like the question, as it made him "miss a beat in the narrative". However, he answered her that magic spells were real in stories.

Roger Skunk reached the wizard's home. The wizard asked him not to come close, as Roger smelt very bad. He asked Roger what he wanted to smell like. Roger said that he wanted to smell like roses. The wizard chanted a magic spell and Roger started smelling like roses.

Jack mistakenly referred to Roger Skunk as Roger Fish. Jo immediately pointed out the mistake.

The Intriguing Twist to the Story

The wizard asked Roger to give him seven pennies, although Roger only had four. The wizard told him where to find the remaining three pennies. Roger Skunk had to go to the end of the lane and turn around three times and look down the magic well. Roger did so and found the pennies, and gave them to the wizard. Now all the other creatures liked to play with Roger because he smelled so good.

Roger Skunk was very happy and reached home. His mother got very angry. She found the new smell of roses 'awful'. She scolded Roger and told him that he didn't smell like a skunk anymore. She took Roger back to the wizard. She hit the wizard over his head and asked him to give Roger Skunk his original smell back.

Jo was surprised. She felt that Roger Skunk would again be lonely. According to her, Mother Skunk was wrong and the wizard should hit her back.

Jo's Ending to the Roger Skunk Story

Jack continued with the story. Both mother and son returned home. Mother Skunk was very happy because Roger smelled like a skunk again. Eventually, all the animals got used to his smell and didn't mind it at all.

Jo still could not relate to the story. She called Mother Skunk stupid. She asked Jack to tell her a story in which the wizard hits Mother Skunk. Jack tried to reason with her and told her that Roger Skunk loved his mother very much and Mother Skunk knew what was right for her baby.

Jack told Joanne to go to sleep and went downstairs to his wife. He felt guilty, looking around at the work she had completed. He found himself stuck in an ugly middle position. He could not convince his daughter and now his wife seemed to be upset with him.

Toward the end of the story, we get a glimpse of the marital tension between Jack and Clare. Though Jack watched his wife work, he did not help her. He felt that both of them were caged together. He did not want to speak with her, work with her or touch her.

NCERT SOLUTIONS

Questions (Page No. 55)

(Reading with Insight)

Question 1. What is the moral issue that the story raises?

Answer: The story explores ethical issues dependent on various levels of maturity. It also discusses the issue of the relationship of the child-parent relationship deeply. There is a sharp contrast between an adult's aspect of life and the worldview of a little child. Though Roger Skunk didn't like the thought of smelling foul again, he agrees with his mom because he loves his mom more than all the other animals. It also shows the kind of trust that Roger had in her mother. This is the kind of trust that Jack had Jo to have in him so that later in life Jo understands how valuable this lesson was for her. Thus, the story proposes the question of whether parents should always be followed blindly.

Question 2. How does Jo want the story to end and why?

Answer: Jo was not satisfied with the ending of the story and persuaded her father to retell the story the next day presenting the story in a predetermined way that she had set. According to Jo, neither Roger skunk nor the Wizard was wrong in the story. She wants this to happen because she cannot see Roger Skunk being left alone by his friends. According to her, Roger is great at smelling like roses and that his friends won't run away from him anymore. She wanted the story to end with the wizard hitting back the mother skunk with his magic wand on her head.

Question 3. Why does Jack insist that it was the wizard that was hit and not the mother?

Answer: Jack insisted that it was the wizard that was hit and not the mother since he wanted Jo to realize that whatever parents do for their kids is for their good. He wanted to make Jo understand that there's no wizard in practical life. Also, his notable defense for Mommy Skunk made Jo aware that Jack was defending his mother or something really important.

Question 4. What makes Jack feel caught in an ugly middle position?

Answer: Jack believes that he has been caught in an ugly middle position physically, emotionally as well as mentally since both his spouse and his daughter are in his presence. He was aware of his responsibilities as a husband and as a father. But he is incapable to choose between the two. Clare is six months pregnant. She's painting the furniture alone and expects Jack to help her. She also says "That was a long story" when Jack comes downstairs. Her explanation makes Jack feel guilty because he couldn't come to help his wife on time. On the other hand, all his struggles to

make Jo fall asleep have gone in vain. Moreover, he couldn't make Jo understand Mommy Skunk was indeed doing what was best for little Roger. Everything that Jack was required to do was left incomplete. He found himself to be in an ugly middle position as he could not wipe out the gap between the old and the modern generation.

Question 5. What is your stance regarding the two endings to the Roger Skunk story?

Answer: Recognizing the young age of Jo, both the endings look a little illogical. Jo will certainly be learning from whatever she listens and visualizes at this age. However, Jo's preference for how the story should look is very beautiful. If the story ends according to Jack, Jo will never be capable of questioning anything she considers wrong in life since this ending emphasizes that elders are always correct in whatever they do. But I agree with the end that Jack decides. This is because it gives the story a touch of Jack's personal life and makes us see how Jack was supported by his mother. It becomes a story with a lesson wherein Jo knows how much Jack loves his mother by his way of defending Mommy Skunk.

Question 6. Why is an adult's perspective on life different from that of a child's?

Answer: An adult's perspective on life is different from that of a child's. This is because a grown-up or adult is an experienced personality. He has more knowledge of life since he has existed for a long time and has seen the harsh facts of life. A child's mind is real, simple, and without any fraud or double mindedness. So, an adult's perspective is always separate from that of a child's.