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Page No: 48 Read and Find Out**1. Who is Jo? How does she respond to her father's story telling?**

Answer: Jo is the shortened form of Joanne. She is the four year old daughter of Jack and Clare. For the last two years, her father, Jack, has been telling her bed-time stories. Since these stories are woven around the same basic tale, they have the same characters and turn of events.

She was an intelligent and inquisitive child. Her mind was bubbling with queries regarding whatever she heard or saw. Her responses to the stories were a curious mixture of emotions caught in recognition of the known. She is also very much eager to explore the unknown aspects woven in the basic tale by her father. An impatient Jo wanted the story to move with a fast pace. However, she could not proceed with conflicting ideas or unresolved queries in her mind. She was also a very observant listener. She also used to correct her father wherever she felt he faltered. The intensity of her engagement with the story was apparent from her body language and facial expressions. She empathized with the protagonist and rejected whatever did not fit in her own narrow world. The eagerness to understand and the restlessness to assert her point of view kept her awake. She was even willing to fight with her father and to coax him to end the story according to her standpoint. Her responses indicate that she had started developing a personality of her own.

Page No: 53**1. What possible plot line could the story continue with?**

Answer: From the perspective of Jo, the story should have ended with a happy note of Roger Skunk getting rid of the foul smell forever and being able to play with all other children. However, from the perspective of Jack, the story may not have such an innocent fairy tale ending. In the process of story telling, it was evident that Jack got nostalgic about his own childhood and his mother. Thus, he brought in his own perspective. His sense of

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belongingness to his mother and his experience of dealing with reality resulted in a mature and compromising end where the reality limited the scope of fiction. As he associated himself with Roger Skunk of his story, he avoided getting into the problematic situation of identity crisis and of blaming his mother.

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1. What do you think was Jo's problem?

Answer: Little Jo had been accustomed to the happy ending of the stories of Roger, where the wizard was helpful to him in fulfilling his wish. At the request of Roger Skunk, the wizard had changed his awful smell to that of the roses. Other small animals liked it and played with Roger Skunk happily. She could not digest the ending of the extended story where Roger Skunk's mother hit the wizard on the head and forced him to change Skunk's smell to the earlier foul one.

Jo could not accept the mother's stubbornness by hitting the well wisher of her son, Roger Skunk. Jo insisted that her father should tell her the same story again the next day with changed ending. The wizard should hit that unreasonable mummy on the head and leave Roger Skunk emitting the pleasant smell of roses. In the beautiful world of a child's imagination, fairies and wizards are more real than reality itself. She could not digest the harsh realities of life. She did not like the unfeeling mother who hit the benefactor of her son.

Page No: 55 Reading with Insight

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

Answer: The story examines moral issues dependent on different levels of maturity. There is a sharp contrast between an adult's perspective of life and the worldview of a little child. Children represent innocence. Hatred and injustice have no place in their world. In the story, the baby skunk was able to make friends only after he smelled of roses. In Jo's perspective, the happiness of being able to make friends surpassed any other thing. As a result, she is unable to assess the reason why the mother skunk pressurized her child to get his original foul body odour restored.

On the contrary, Jack tried to justify the skunk's mother and wanted Roger to listen to his mother even if it means smelling bad again. Jack, a typical father, wanted his daughter to

believe that parents are always correct and they know what is best for their children. Thus, the story raises the question of whether parents should always be followed blindly.

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

Answer: Jo was not convinced with the ending of the story and coaxed her father to retell the story the next day giving the story a predetermined path that she had set. According to her, neither Roger Skunk nor the wizard was wrong in the story. Jo refused to accept the end where Roger Skunk's mother hit the wizard and that too without being hit back. She wanted the story to end with the wizard hitting back the mother skunk with his magic wand on her head.

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

Answer: 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.

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

Answer: Jack feels that he has been caught in an ugly middle position physically, emotionally as well as mentally. The woodwork, a cage of moldings 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 a ugly middle position as he could not wipe out the gap between the old and the young generation.

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

Answer: Considering the tender age of Jo, both the endings seem a little irrational. It is certain that she will be learning from whatever she hears and visualizes at this age. If the story ends according to Jack, Jo will never be able to question anything she considers wrong in life since this ending stresses that elders are always right in whatever they do. In addition, the story shows the skunk's mommy hitting the wizard for no fault of his. The wizard had only done what he was asked to. This may scare the four-year-old Jo, as it teaches that mothers, being elders, have the right to hit anyone, even if they are not at fault. On the contrary, if the story ends as Jo wanted it to, it will stop her from believing in and respecting her elders. She may even start believing that there is nothing wrong in hitting elders.

A balanced view may be given in an apt ending, where the mommy either does not hit the wizard at all or realizes her mistake soon.

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

Answer: A child's speech and line of thought, his actions and reactions, are natural and not guided by any outward influence. He speaks from his heart in accordance with what is ethically right in his perspective. On the other hand, an adult has many things to consider before speaking or reacting. Thus, the influence of society governs and dominates his thoughts.

In this chapter, Jo speaks what she considers correct. But Jack, an adult caught in a dilemma, kept thinking on the consequences of accepting his daughter's ending to the story and what the society has made him learn over time. The changing trends, the growing individuality, the women's liberation from male domination and decaying human values ---all refer to an adult's world. However, a child is ignorant of all this and judges the world around with his /her own perspective.

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