

SPECIAL EDUCATION METAPHOR NUMBER ONE: SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS

BY WILLIAM CRAWFORD

Once upon a time, a young girl named Snow White lived with her wealthy father and beautiful stepmother. Snow White was a comely lass, but she didn't want to marry a handsome prince, as all the other good-looking, wealthy girls did. Instead, she wanted to become a teacher. Her father, proud of her desire to serve humanity, sent her to the kingdom's most prestigious college. Snow White graduated with honors and returned home to look for a teaching position.

Shortly after her graduation, her father fell ill and died, leaving all his wealth to his wife. Now the stepmother's true nature became clear. She had been kind to Snow White while her husband was alive, but now her resentment of the girl consumed her. She too had once wanted to become a teacher, but her GPA was too low for her to be admitted to any college. So she used her beauty to catch the richest widower in the kingdom. Now he was dead, and she had no reason to be civil to his brainy and beautiful daughter.

The stepmother had a magic mirror. Every morning, she gazed into the mirror and asked, "Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?" For years, the mirror answered, "You are the fairest of them all." But one day, in fact on Snow White's 18th birthday, it answered, "Snow White is the fairest of them all." The thought that the girl was not only college material but also the fairest in the land was too much to bear. Furious, the stepmother hired a woodsman to take Snow White into the forest and kill her.

But the woodsman couldn't carry out the orders. He took Snow White into the woods but let her go, telling her to follow the path in front of her to another village, where she could change her name and be safe.

Snow White walked and walked. Finally, she came to a tiny cottage where seven dwarfs lived. The dwarfs spent every day mining diamonds for a huge consortium. They came home exhausted, and diamond dust was ruining their lungs. Snow White convinced them that

education was their key to a better life, perhaps as physicians, lawyers, accountants, or even teachers like herself.

Snow White took great pains to apply everything she had learned at college. To set a serious tone, she converted the dining room into a classroom and required the dwarfs to spend six hours each day attending school. So every evening, after their long days in the mine, the dwarfs sat at small desks arranged in straight rows.

Things got off to a good start. They tried to read the lessons that Snow White assigned from seven or eight textbooks and answer all the questions at the end of each chapter. They tried to follow the rules of conduct that Snow White had posted around the room. They didn't talk to each other during their lessons. They asked permission to use the restroom, get a drink of water, and to sharpen their pencils.

Snow White's school went smoothly for a few days. The dwarfs were eager to learn and to please their teacher. But before the first week was over, Snow White ran into trouble.

It started with Dopey.

Dopey wasn't like the other dwarfs. He had big ears and his clothes were too big. He looked and acted different. As class clown, he couldn't sit still. Snow White was sure that he must be mentally deficient. He certainly couldn't stay in the classroom, because he distracted the other dwarfs. So Dopey was sent outside to play during school time. "Don't come back until you can sit still," Snow White scolded.

Then there was Happy.

Happy couldn't stay on task because

he enjoyed what was going on around him and found the humor in any situation. His comments and laughter were as distracting to the other dwarfs as Dopey's antics had been. So Snow White sent him out to keep Dopey company. "Don't come back until you can keep quiet," she admonished. Then she proceeded with proper classroom instruction.

Until something else went wrong.

The dwarfs were jolted from their concentration by Sneezzy's hay fever. Snow White diagnosed his problem as chronic sinusitis and sent him into the woods to find some sort of root or sap or weed to brew into tea to control his problem. "Don't come back until you're cured," she chided.

Things went well for a few days before another problem appeared. Grumpy had been sitting still, keeping quiet, and doing his work, but he had never seemed excited about school. He obviously had a bad attitude, but as long as he didn't cause trouble, that was acceptable to Snow White. Then one day, he began to grumble under his breath. Snow White ignored the behavior, but the grumbling got louder, and soon Grumpy was complaining about everything—the boring textbooks,

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the number of worksheets, the memorization. Snow White couldn't allow his attitude to influence the other dwarfs, so she sent him outside. "Don't come back until you can show some enthusiasm about school," she warned.

Three dwarfs remained in Snow White's classroom. With this smaller number, she was sure that she could do a better job of teaching.

But another problem soon arose.

Sleepy couldn't stay awake. Worn out from work and bored with the schoolwork, he kept nodding off—and snoring!—during lectures. Snow White had to send him upstairs to bed—there was no other alternative. "Don't come back until you've caught up on your sleep," she ordered.

Now only Bashful and Doc were left. They certainly weren't behavior problems, but Bashful had no self-esteem. Snow White graded on a curve, and even when he did his best, he never got an "A" because Doc always had higher scores. His self-confidence sank so low that it was obvious that he was emotionally disturbed. Snow White had to ask him to leave, too. "Don't come back until you feel better about yourself," she told him.

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That left Doc, who did everything right—the reading, the essay questions, the worksheets. He was an exemplary student. If only the other six dwarfs could do as well.

During the time that Snow White had spent at the dwarfs' cottage, her stepmother had never stopped talking to the magic mirror, which continued to inform her that Snow White was the fairest of them all. She tracked down Snow White, disguised herself as a textbook peddler, and knocked on the cottage door. Snow White described some of the problems that she had been having, and her peddler-stepmother convinced her that she needed to test the dwarfs to measure their abilities and place them in appropriate settings. She sold Snow White

seven copies of the DSAT (Dwarf Standardized Achievement Test). As a special gift, she gave Snow White a shiny red, poisoned apple. Snow White thanked the peddler, took a bite of the apple, and fell into a deep sleep. Only the kiss of the Prince of Effective Instruction can wake her now. ✍

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