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Joi Cuartero
College of DuPage

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Fairy Tale Faith

by Joi Cuartero

(English 102)

The Assignment: Using the concepts learned in class and two of the below “Cinderella” variants, respond in a mildly argumentative essay to the question: “Why would you read the two variants to your child?”

I remember the day that I got my first Disney movie. My dad had just come home from work and he called me out of my room because he had something for me. To my knowledge this was the first present that I ever remember my dad giving me. I hurried down the hall to meet him in the living room where I stood gazing up at him longing for what was behind his back. It turned out to be the Disney animated movie “Cinderella” and we have collected almost every single Disney movie since. After reading more versions of this classic tale, there are two specific versions, in addition to the classic version, that I would like to some day share with my children. These stories of “Oochigeaskw” and “Vasalisa” go beyond what “Cinderella” has to offer. These versions can teach my children to have faith in themselves so that they may overcome any obstacles that get in their way.

“Oochigeaskw,” the Native American version of “Cinderella,” focuses on more than just wishful thinking because it shows how independence can bring about the desired results anyone wishes to achieve. After careful analysis, I have found that the other versions of “Cinderella,” though entertaining, have been a disappointment when it comes to attaining wishes with self motivation. Although “Cinderella” can help children understand that they can eventually get through hard times, the story still has Cinderella’s wishes being granted by some birds, a tree, or her godmother. The story of “Oochigeaskw” shows that wishful thinking can become reality by taking initiative to achieve goals. In the story, while Cinderella has someone give her a dress, Oochigeaskw makes her own clothes (“Oochigeaskw” 554). Furthermore, Oochigeaskw does not let anyone make the decision for her to go get her prince; she simply wants to go and does so (“Oochigeaskw” 555). Despite any harsh criticism, Oochigeaskw makes her way to her prince and, unlike those who tried before her, she marries him (“Oochigeaskw” 555). She believes enough in herself to get to where she wants to be.

Oochigeaskw demonstrates both independence and strong self-esteem against those who try to put her down. These qualities are what I would like my children to see in a character they can admire. By reading this version to them, they can see someone who does not just go to a ball to run away from what she is looking for, but someone who has the self esteem to see the entire experience through and get her prince. Just like any Cinderella, Oochigeaskw is treated unfairly and cruelly by those closest to her; however, she does not let that bring her down. And unlike other “Cinderella” versions, the older sister actually physically abuses Oochigeaskw while her absentee father does not seem to pay attention to his injured daughter (“Oochigeaskw” 554). If the father had been observant he would realize that there is abuse going on in the household. Oochigeaskw’s strength carries on beyond the house when she goes off to try to see the Invisible One, who is her prince in the story (“Oochigeaskw” 555). She has strength because despite the scars her sister inflicts on her body, she still attempts her chance at becoming the Invisible One’s wife (“Oochigeaskw” 555). Oochigeaskw does not let others put her down and get in her way. When it comes to certain things, whether it is in school, work, or the hobbies my children may have, they should know that they can accomplish them on their own.

Oochigeaskw’s self-esteem helps to pave the way for the strong will she must have when odds appear to be against her. Perhaps my children have to meet a deadline or they have numerous extracurricular activities and school to juggle. Then they should know that their inner strength will always help them in tight situations. Oochigeaskw indicates to her family and her village that she has the will to continue even if it does not seem she will likely get the husband she aspires to marry (“Oochigeaskw” 555). Outside the family, the village also tries to bring her down by insulting her,

calling her names, and attempting to break her will to go to the Invisible One's home ("Oochigeaskw" 555). However, Oochigeaskw stays strong against the odds to have her chance at love. I want my children to know that if they really want something, they should have the will to get it because no one can get anywhere by standing still.

The story of "Oochigeaskw" also shows that being honest with one's self and with others is the best way to reach aspired goals. I took a class my freshman year of college and one of the things that I learned and thought was very important was to never lose credibility because no one wants to do business with someone who is not credible. Honesty is something that should be applied in my children's personalities and not just looked at from a business perspective. My children should understand that deception never helps people move forward; it stifles people because others deal less with them when there is a lack of trust. Honesty works in two ways and Oochigeaskw demonstrates both. She is honest with others, and she is honest with herself. Oochigeaskw does not have to lie, like the women before her, when the Invisible One's sister asks her if she can see him ("Oochigeaskw" 555). All the other women give false answers to the questions that are asked, but Oochigeaskw is the one who really knows the answer, tells the truth, and in turn marries the Invisible One ("Oochigeaskw" 555). Furthermore, Oochigeaskw has enough sense to be honest with herself. She does not try to cover up the scars that have been inflicted on her and mask them with beautiful clothing ("Oochigeaskw" 554). She makes her own clothes with what she has and does not let her appearance stop her from seeking the Invisible One ("Oochigeaskw" 554). She is able to be herself, without falsifying anything, and she is rewarded for it. I want my children to be able to believe in themselves and be true to who they are without trying to lie or be someone they are not.

In addition to reading "Oochigeaskw" to my children, I will read the story of "Vasalisa," which tells the tale of, first and foremost, bravery. Vasalisa is a woman who is not afraid of being on her own even if she is in dangerous conditions. In Clarissa Pinkola Estés' recording of "Vasalisa," when Vasalisa's stepmother and stepsisters tell her to go into the forest to get wood for the fire she does it all alone. Estés tells readers that in the forest, Vasalisa is to find a witch from whom she, despite the witch's vicious appearance, needs to get the fire. As Estés tells the story, the woods are a dark and treacherous place and she is alone with no protection of her own, but she courageously makes it in and out. Estés says that Vasalisa then goes into the forest, as night falls, and does not turn back until she finds what she has been sent out for. Estés goes on to say, naturally, Vasalisa finds the witch and has to face the ugly and feared woman all on her own as well. These examples show her courage extending beyond the norm and are something that my children should observe. Life is full of situations that may appear to be uncomfortable, or unbearable, and this is where bravery is needed the most. The biggest place that I have found myself to falter has been when major changes in my life have occurred. When I moved out of a home that was mine for ten years, I was very afraid that I would not be able to find my comfort zone again. However, with a little courage and strength, I was able to make my new environment another comfort zone. I hope that my children can be brought up with enough bravery to overcome barriers that stand in the way of their achievements.

Hand in hand with the bravery comes instinct that Vasalisa has to trust that even when reaching her goal appears to be hopeless, she will ultimately reach it. Estés relates that Vasalisa's instinct comes in the form of a doll she carries for comfort. Estés says the memory of her mother resides in the doll and it becomes her guide through the difficulties she encounters. Whether it is which direction to go in the forest or facing the witch, Estés narrates how Vasalisa learns to go with her gut feeling, which leads her down the correct path. Estés describes that when the witch gives Vasalisa an impossible task in return for the fire, Vasalisa trusts that the task can be done. Estés relates that even when Vasalisa wishes to question the witch when she is given the fire, her instinct stops her from angering the witch and getting into any danger. Estés describes that with Vasalisa's instinct she is able to safely get in and out of the forest unharmed, successfully retrieving the fire she was sent out for. The instinct that I have inside myself is that of my faith. Whenever I feel that I am in any danger or I may not know my way, I rely on my own intuition and a little bit of prayer, and I know that I will eventually find my way out.

The obedience Vasalisa has reveals that she is a hardworking individual who can take care of

herself. Estés reveals that Vasalisa has the ability to listen to her stepmother and stepsisters and do what they ask without question. Vasalisa cares for them as well as for herself and attends to them in the story by keeping the house warm with fire. Estés tells listeners that when the house is no longer warm, Vasalisa goes out of her way to fetch the means for fire to make the house warm. The journey alone shows the hard work and lengths Vasalisa will go through for the happiness of her family. Through this example my children should know that hard work is what will get them to where they want to be. Being lucky can get people things on a silver platter; however, the majority must work hard for what they want and will succeed if the effort is shown. I am not extremely gifted at one particular thing, but have the work ethic to try my best and my hardest so that I can reach my goals. I work hard on assignments for school and tasks at work to get the grade or acknowledgement I deserve. I hope my children will be born with talents so that some things will come easily to them, but they must know that trying their best and working hard are what will get them desired results.

The final quality that is present in Vasalisa is her patience. Although Vasalisa's family treats her with such cruelty, Estés tells how Vasalisa still regards them as family and proceeds to do what they ask. Her patience extends to the tedious duties the witch forces her to complete as well as to the long journey to the witch's house, narrates Estés. When she is there, Estés describes that Vasalisa does not demand anything from the witch; instead she waits until that following day before she can get the fire she has asked for. What my children should discover is that there will be times when what they wish for cannot be immediate. Sometimes it will take time to get the quality they want out of a situation. Usually, whatever they may be working on will have better quality because they took the time to perfect it as much as they could. There have been countless assignments and projects that have succeeded because I gave them time to develop into something I could be proud of. Procrastination and rushing does much more harm than working steadily on something until it is finished. Having patience and realizing that there are some things that cannot happen overnight can also help in achieving set goals.

By telling my children these two stories, they can begin to understand the qualities that can help them be assured that they can overcome anything. They can receive their happy ending by using their own merits and without the help of others because they are capable of doing so. They should always have faith in themselves and rely on what they have within them. Thus, even if they feel that all the odds are against them and perhaps they will not achieve their goal, hard work, good self esteem, patience, and the will to reach the goal will propel them forward. Both Oochigeaskw and Vasalisa have these characteristics while showing that they have faith in themselves. Those traits will show my children that they can conquer any barrier to reach their destination.

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