

Age-Appropriate Inclusivity in Early Childhood Stories

— Jess Moore & Carolyn Harrison

Our school, Maine Coast Waldorf School, has been working on ways to be more inclusive while still upholding a developmentally appropriate curriculum. In our community we have gender-fluid children as well as many children from same-sex parents. So that they could see themselves reflected in stories, we looked for some that seemed to lend themselves to a more inclusive adaptation. In working with stories in this way, we can be sure that we are meeting the children and families of today, while penetrating the material enough to bring it in an age-appropriate way.

This spring we reworked the story of “Twiggy” to be about a gender-fluid child within a family of same-sex

parents. We questioned whether the children would be awakened by the images in the story, presented as a puppet show. Twiggy had two mothers and was a boy who wore pink and had long hair. None of the children in all of our classes had any reaction; they dreamed into the stories and characters just as we would hope.

Children are accepting of human beings that identify with different genders, sexualities and orientations. We share this story with the Early Childhood community so that you can see how we adapted this tale and can start looking at ways stories can reflect inclusivity in your classrooms.

Twiggy

— A Ukrainian Folktale, adapted by Carolyn Harrison & Jess Moore

Once upon a time there lived a woman and her wife. They were getting old and had no children of their own, so they were sad and thought “Who will look after us as we grow old?” The woman said to her wife, “Go along to the forest, my dear, fetch me a little branch, a little twig, make it fine and smooth and shape a cradle for it too. I will put the little twig in the cradle and rock it and that shall be our joy!”

At first her wife did not want to go, but the old woman kept begging, so in the end the wife agreed and went off to the woods to cut a little twig and make a cradle for it too. Then the old woman put the little twig in the cradle and sang it a song:

*Sleep my baby sleep
Soo soo soo
I shall make some soup for you
I shall make a little stew
Sleep my baby sleep
Soo soo soo*

She cradled it till the evening and when they got up the next morning, lo, the little twig had come to life and was a little child. The two old women were so pleased and, as the child was so small, they called him Twiggy.

Little Twiggy grew and prospered, and was so pretty that they never tired of looking at him.

As Twiggy was growing up he said, “Mother dears, will you make for me a golden boat, please? I shall go out on the stream and catch some fish and thereby nourish you.” The old mothers made for him a golden boat and together they carried it to the riverside.

Twiggy got into the boat and went rowing along and singing:

*Rowing in my little boat
On the shining waves afloat,
Catching fish from water clear,
For my Mothers old and dear.*



When he had caught some fish, he brought them home and then went out rowing again.

The old woman used to bring him food and said, "Listen to me, Twiggy: whenever I call you, come to the bank, but should a stranger call, just keep rowing."

So the time passed; the old woman cooked the dinner, she carried it to the riverbank and called: "Come to the bank, my Twiggy dear. Come, for dinner time is here."

Twiggy heard her and spoke to his little boat, "Swim, little boat, swim to the bank, for mother has brought my mid-day meal." He rowed to the bank and ate and drank. Then he pushed his little boat into the water again and went on fishing.

One day, however, a snake heard his mother calling, and it slid down to the riverbank and called with a full voice:

"Come to the bank, my Twiggy dear, Come, for dinner time is here."

Twiggy lifted his head and listened. "That is not my dear mother's voice; swim little boat, swim on." He went on rowing in his golden boat.

But the snake went along to the blacksmith and said, "Smith, take a hammer and make my voice as fine as Twiggy's mother's voice." This the blacksmith did and the snake slid back to the riverbank and called:

"Come to the bank, my Twiggy dear. Come, for dinner time is here."

When Twiggy heard the fine voice he thought it was really his mother, and he turned his boat round

calling, "Swim, swim to the bank, my golden boat, for my mother dear has brought my dinner."

So he landed his boat and the snake pulled him out of the boat and wanted to swallow him. But Twiggy was very quick and climbed up into a tree. The snake tried to gnaw through the stem of the tree and with its sharp teeth gnawed and gnawed. Now the tree was nearly falling over with Twiggy on it! But just then a goose was flying past and Twiggy called up to it:

*Goose, oh help me please, I pray,
Quickly carry me away,
Through the storms and through the clouds
Home into my mother's house!*

And lo and behold the goose, who had hardly any breath left herself, took Twiggy along. He sat on her back and his heart was beating, for she was flying very low. The snake stretched and wanted to snatch Twiggy, but the snake could not get hold of him. He was saved.

The goose carried him and seated him on the garden wall, while she herself rested awhile in the yard. Twiggy on the garden wall heard everything that was going on inside the house. Mother was baking little cookies; she took them out of the oven and said, "Here my good old wife, one cookie for you and one for me." So Twiggy called from outside, "And what about me?"

"There's someone else wants a cookie," the old mother said. She went to the window and whom did she see but their Twiggy, sitting on the garden wall.

So both the old women ran outside, took their Twiggy by the hands and were ever so pleased.

Then the old woman saw the goose in the yard and called out, “What a splendid goose—I will take and roast it!”

“Oh no, dear mother, don’t do that; rather give her some food, for, but for this goose, I would not be with you now.”

He told all that had happened, and they gave the goose good food and drink, so she could get her strength back and could fly away.

As for Twiggy, he lived with his Mothers, went fishing in his golden boat, and never again would listen to a false voice. ♦

Resources:

- The original version of “Twiggy” can be found in *Let Us Form a Ring* (Acorn Hill Waldorf Nursery and Kindergarten; available from WECAN).

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