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# *For the Classroom, Inside and Out*

## **A Healing Story for the Classroom**

— Jessica Oswald

One chilly morning in late autumn, Father Mouse stepped outside his door. He breathed in deeply so that his chest puffed all the way out and he smelled the north wind blowing. Father Mouse looked at the leaves scattered all over the forest floor. He bent down and picked up one maple leaf, he looked at it closely and then held it up to father sun and admired the ice crystals glittering all over the leaf. “Oh, Jackie Frost has been dancing all around here,” he thought.

Father Mouse quickly scampered back into his house, calling out “Today is moving day.” You see, when the north wind begins to blow through the forest the Mouse family must move to their winter home. They leave their summer home built of twigs, moss, and dried leaves next to the stream and move into Farmer Brown’s garden. Farmer Brown always leaves his biggest pumpkin in the pumpkin patch for one of the forest creatures to make a snug home in the winter. Now the Mouse family must work hard to pack all their belongings and load them onto the wagon.

Matilda, the youngest Mouse daughter, was given the task of loading the wagon with jars of jams, pickles, and all the other food they took great care to preserve all summer long. She was so busy going back and forth from her kitchen to the wagon that she did not notice Sammy Jay watching her from the lowest tree branch. Sammy Jay spread his wings swooped down and landed right on top of Matilda. With his sharp beak he pulled out some of her soft grey fur. Matilda was surprised and yelled, “Go away, Sammy Jay! With you I will not play.” She did not like the way Sammy played with her. And Sammy liked Matilda so much that he only wanted to be with her and no one else. He flew back to his branch and rocked back and forth calling out. “Matilda, Matilda, Matilda!”

Matilda covered her ears with her paws. Mother Mouse stepped outside the front door to see what was the matter. She looked up and saw Sammy Jay’s little beady eyes staring at her. “Good morning Sammy

Jay, today is moving day and we could use your help,” said Mother Mouse. Sammy Jay spread his wings and flew to a higher branch, all the while screeching out Matilda’s name.

Matilda has three brothers and they had all finished with their work. As it was lunchtime, their mother packed them a picnic of cheese pie, wild blueberry muffins, and warm mint tea and sent them outside. All three brothers came tumbling out the door at once and rolled around on the soft grass. The oldest brother called out, “Let’s skip to the riverbank and picnic there.” But no one could hear him because Sammy Jay would not be quiet. “Sammy Jay, would you please stop making all that noise.” They invited Sammy to picnic with them at the riverbank, but he Jay just flew to the very top of the tree. He did not like to have his feathers ruffled or get dirt in his claws. From his perch he could see far and wide.

He watched as the Mouse children skipped down the path to the water. Sammy Jay was not the only one watching the Mouse children. Farmer Brown’s cat Tiger was creeping through the woods hunting for his lunch. He spied the mice from a distance and hid behind a fallen log. As Matilda was getting closer, Tiger crouched low and his tail twitched back and forth. Sammy Jay spied the tip of Tiger’s tail and knew what he was up to. He spread his great blue wings and dove down beak first. Sammy Jay landed on Tiger right as he was about to pounce on Matilda and pecked him on his tail. Tiger was so startled that he turned around and ran right back to Farmer Brown’s front porch and licked his tail until it stopped hurting.

The Mouse brothers were surprised to find Sammy Jay out of his tree and on the ground. His feathers were all dusty and full of dried leaves and he had even gotten mud on his claws. The Mouse children ran back to their home to tell Mother and Father how Sammy Jay saved Matilda. Mother and Father were

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so pleased and grateful that they decided to have a party that evening in honor of Sammy Jay and they invited all the creatures of the forest to the party.

The next day Mother Mouse taught Sammy Jay how to knock on their door and ask politely if her children would like to play. Every day Sammy Jay tapped on their door with his beak and all the children would play together.

### Author's Note

This story was written for a situation that was occurring in my class during late autumn. I have a boy in my class, who I'll call Timothy, who turned five in the winter. He is an only child and both his parents are physicians and are older. When I went to visit Timothy in his home, his father greeted me, telling me his son is a genius. I laughed, thinking he was just joking. However, Timothy lives completely in his head. He is able to read and write and do arithmetic problems quickly. His parents told me they have not taught him, but rather he has taught himself. He also loves to do art, and creates worlds for himself and by himself. I was told that in nursery he only observed everything, would very rarely enter play, and if he did it was only with one girl. The girl was later sent to a different kindergarten.

At the beginning of the school year Timothy would not play with anyone. He worked with me and stayed close to whatever I was doing. During free play he would often get crayons and paper and draw the whole time. While outside, he would climb into a tree and watch everything. I could get him to work with me at a task like gardening, cleaning, or handwork, but when we finished he would go back up into the tree.

After a few weeks, he began to take a special liking to one of the girls in the class. This girl was full of sunshine and goodness . . . everyone wanted to be with her. However, Timothy wanted her all to himself. During snack, he wanted all of her attention and would say her name constantly and tell her long stories. Outside, he would sit in the tree and wait for her to pass and then jump down and follow her everywhere. Timothy would yank on the hood of her coat and tug her backwards. Also, he was talking about her incessantly at home and drawing pictures for her all the time. The girl soon grew tired of him and could no longer find any kindness for him. So

she would push him away, usually knocking him to the ground, and yell at him to leave her alone. During this time both parents became concerned, as did I, and I told them I would keep an eye on the situation. But in the meantime, I did ask his mother not to admonish him or ask him every day if he had bothered his female classmate.

During all of this Gerald Karnow, our school doctor, paid us a visit—he spent the whole morning with the kindergarten. When the day had finished, we were able to meet to discuss his observations. Timothy stood out and we talked about him for most of the time. Dr. Karnow said, “You have to write a therapeutic story for him.” Great idea!

I went to work right away. I was familiar with the idea and had read Susan Perrow's book, *Healing Stories for Challenging Behavior*. I had also taken a storytelling workshop with Nancy Mellon.

I looked at the situation as objectively as I could and began to make notes. I wanted not only to address what was happening with the boy, I also wanted to help the girl have a healthy response to him. In the middle of a blank page I drew a circle representing the sun and created rays with what could be metaphors used in the story. I wanted to bring it into the realm of nature, so I began to think of characteristics of animals that might be similar to the behavior. This activity took a few days, as I was unsure. During this time I had been watching my cats interact with a blue jay. This bird would torment them . . . diving down right above their heads just low enough for them to think they could catch him, but then swooping right back up. This would go on for quite some time. The blue jays also get into my chicken coop and help themselves to food. As for the mice, they are gentle creatures, industrious, and adorably tiny.

In the story, I used the blue jay, the mouse, and the cat as metaphors. According to Susan Perrow, “a metaphor shows us one thing as another, and in doing so extends the way we see the world, also often refreshing and enlivening our perception” (Perrow at 80). In creating a healing story, we are able to rise above the situation and see it in a brand-new way. I struggled with how to bring it in a way that was not obvious to the children. As Perrow states, “we do not want to moralize or induce guilt, and through the story provide an acceptable means of dealing with the behavior and a positive resolution” (57).

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In thinking about all of this, I created a little nature tale that I hoped would bring balance to the relationship, and a story that the whole class could hear and enjoy. I told the story during snack, as that is when I bring nature stories. I told it three times and then put it away to see what would happen. The stalking behavior that Timothy was exhibiting lessened and over time stopped completely. His classmate, the recipient of his suffocation, asked for the story many times. I did help in other ways with their relationship, by having them work with me on tasks in the classroom. That way they could be together, but with my care around them.

I am grateful to be in a position and place where using this type of medium is acceptable and encouraged. Rudolf Steiner said that Waldorf education is a healing education, and using the art

of storytelling is a very sure way of healing. I am sure my story could use more tweaking, and am curious to know what you think of it and where it could use some help.

*Please send comments to us at [gateways@waldorfearlychildhood.org](mailto:gateways@waldorfearlychildhood.org). We will forward them to Jessica. ♦*

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**Resources:**

- Susan Perrow, *Healing Stories for Challenging Behavior* (Gloucestershire, UK: Hawthorn Press, 2008)