

Lesson from a Book: *The Empty Pot*, by Demi (from Chinese folklore)

published by Henry Holt and Company, 1990

Synopsis of Story

A young boy, Ping, loves gardening and has a green thumb with flowers. The king announces a contest to see who can grow the most beautiful flower from seeds he provides, the winner to become his heir to the throne. Ping enters and tries everything, but cannot get his seed to sprout. When the time comes to present their flowers to the king, everyone else has beautiful and grand flowers, but Ping can only bring an empty pot. The king calls Ping forward and announces that the seeds everyone was given had been cooked to prevent them from sprouting. He rewards Ping's honesty by making him the heir to his throne.

SUGGESTED LESSON PLAN

Opening

Begin with opening greetings. If the children do not all know one another, be sure to include introductions. Allow for a period of check-in. Ask how the week was for each, and if they have had experiences they would like to share.

Query

The following Quaker query may be used for older children. Otherwise it is for the preparation of the teacher.

Are you honest and truthful in all you say and do? Do you maintain strict integrity in business transactions and in your dealings with individuals and organizations? Do you use money and information entrusted to you with discretion and responsibility? Taking oaths implies a double standard of truth; in choosing to affirm instead, be aware of the claim to integrity that you are making.

—Quaker Faith and Practice, Britain Yearly Meeting

The Story

Have children who can read read the story and show the pictures to the group. For the youngest children you may have to do the reading or ask an older child to help.

Discussion and "I Wonder" Questions

1. Why do you think the king set up this contest?
2. I wonder where the flowers grown by the other children came from.
3. How do you suppose Ping felt when he brought an empty pot?
4. Have you ever felt like Ping did?

5. How did the king feel about Ping and about the other children?
6. (older children) I wonder how things might have been different if the kingdom had been a truly open community where everyone shared experiences with others.
7. (older children) How do you feel about the king's deception?
8. Have there been times when you were tempted to be dishonest in order to look better to others?

Appropriate Age Level

Primary (ages 5 to 11), but story can be appreciated at any age.

Lesson Focus

Integrity, Persistence

Activity Suggestions

For the youngest children, plant seeds (radishes come up quickly) in an egg carton, with one seed in each segment. Water and cover it and see what happens in a couple of weeks. This activity helps children appreciate the work and joy involved in growing things, and makes the story more real to them. If someone suggests baking some of the seeds, try that.

In the late spring or early summer, buy a tray of annuals with buds but flowers not yet blooming. Each child is responsible for a plant. If there is a place on the meeting house grounds where they can be planted, each child plants and waters his/her plant and the next week or two the class can go outside to look at the flowers. Otherwise, each child takes a plant home and cares for it there.

Decorate a pot, such as a red clay flower pot. The important part of the decoration is to add self-adhesive labels on which each child has written a Friends testimony. You may have to tell them what a testimony is. The children may also include Quaker values and beliefs, and this is OK. Each child reads his/her label as it is placed on the pot. Older children or the teacher may need to do the writing for the youngest ones. Colorful pictures or patterns may, of course, also be on the labels. You may also add other decorations, such as children's names. The pot may be used in a number of ways, depending on how First Day School is conducted. It may be made at the beginning, and placed in the center as the story is read. It may be used for worship centering at the end of the session. Finally, it may be shared with the entire meeting.

Song

I Would Be True, #261 in Worship in Song (Quaker Press of FGC)

Closing

Form a circle, holding hands, for closing silent worship.

Lesson prepared by David Wood, Dayton Monthly Meeting, OVYM, for the Religious Education Committee of Friends General Conference