

MIND MAP

SUMMARY OF THE STORY

“Should Wizard Hit Mommy?” by John Updike revolves around the conflicting views of a child and a parent.

Jack was the father of two little kids – Jo and Bobby. His wife Clare was carrying their third child. When it came to telling Jo a bedtime story, you could always see Jack in the bed with the little girl of four telling stories.

But the problem was, Jack’s stories were the ditto copies of his one and only story – story of Roger, a creature that suffered loneliness in a forest because it suffered from certain disabilities. Every new story that Jack told Jo was a variation of the base story and mostly the difference in the story was Roger’s being a cat, chipmunk, mouse, fish, etc., and the deformity or illness it suffered. In telling the stories, Jack was able to indulge his gift for creating suspense and his love of language, even when the references would go over Jo’s head. Jack crafts Roger Skunk in his own image: a skunk who is isolated from other animals much like Jack was as a young boy. Roger is lonely because of his smell. One Saturday Jack asked Jo about whom the story should be today. Roger Skunk, she said firmly. Jack started the story of the tiny creature Skunk, who lived in the dark deep woods. He smelled so bad that other animals of the jungle would not play with him. They would run away and Roger Skunk would stand there all alone. Though Jo is unaware, Jack is channeling his frustration in his marriage into the story, and becomes increasingly upset when Jo contradicts him, as it reminds him of Clare.

Roger Skunk went to the wise old owl and told his problem. The owl asked Skunk why he did not see the Wizard. Then he went to the Wizard and told that he smelled very bad and all the little animals used to run away from him. The wise owl had told wizard that he could help in that manner. The Wizard took his magic wand and asked Roger Skunk what he wanted to smell like. Roger Skunk told him that he would like to smell like roses. The Wizard chanted and Roger Skunk started smelling like roses. The Wizard asked Roger Skunk to pay seven pennies. Roger Skunk said that he had four pennies only and he began to cry. The Wizard directed Roger to go to the nearby magic well and he would find three pennies there. Roger Skunk took out three pennies from the well and gave them to the Wizard. Now all the other animals gathered around him because he smelled so good. They played various games and laughed. It began to get dark so they all ran home to their mummies.

But as the story is about to reach its climax, Jo grows all the more fussy and distracted and Jack changes the structure of his story in hopes of re-capturing his daughter’s interest. He tells her that when Roger came home from the wizard’s house, his mother was furious. Instead of being happy that he had changed his smell, she is angry. She demands that they return to the wizard so he can change Roger back and his mother can hit the wizard over the head. But Jo demands Jack to change the story: she wants the wizard to refuse to change Roger back, and to hit Roger’s “stupid mommy” over the head with his wand. Unprepared for his daughter’s intensity and violent wish, Jack attempts to explain that Roger was better off with his old smell because it was what his mother wanted and he loved his mother more than he cared what the other animals thought about him.

Thoroughly tired, Jack brings story time to an end and urges Jo to go to sleep. Jo, in turn, demands that, in tomorrow’s story, the wizard must hit Roger Skunk’s mother over the head instead. Jack does not answer her, and instead goes downstairs to finally help his wife. When he gets downstairs however, Jack is too weary to help, and instead sits in a chair and watches his wife repaint their living room. He sees the molding in their house as a cage surrounding him and his wife. He has no desire to work with her or even talk to her or touch her.

3. Should Wizard Hit Mommy

by John Updike

CHARACTER SKETCH: Jack

Jack is the protagonist of the story ‘Should Wizard Hit Mommy?’ and lives with his pregnant wife Clare, their four-year-old daughter Jo, and their two-year-old son, Bobby. Jack is conscious of his duties as a father and husband. Uninspired by and disillusioned with the responsibilities of family life, Jack uses the stale ritual of telling his daughter a bedtime story to avoid helping his wife re-paint their living room to prepare for the arrival of their third child. A talented storyteller, Jack takes pride in creating engrossing stories for Jo even though he is quickly running out of fresh ideas. He has the typical parental attitude and opinion that parents know what is best for their children. Jack feels caught in an ugly middle position physically, emotionally and mentally. He did not like women to take anything for granted, to the extent that he extends the story, changing the ending, giving it the face that he wants to. Jack is someone who is not used to his authority being questioned. Though a loving parent, he finds it hard to accept the fact now Jo has a mind of her own. His insensitivity and impatience comes across his dealings with his daughter, and the facts that an adult’s viewpoint is different from a child’s perspective.

CHARACTER SKETCH: Jo

Jack and Clare’s four-year-old daughter, Jo is a growing girl. She is growing taller by the day, has begun to contradict things her parents tell her, and no longer falls asleep at nap time. All of these traits worry and upset Jack because he realizes he will soon have another woman in his life contradicting him the way his wife Clare does. Indeed, Jo is intent on exercising her opinions and having her ideas heard, even at a young age. With respect to the story of Roger Skunk, Jo does not agree with the ending that her father proposes. As a young child, Jo relates to Roger’s desire to be accepted by his peers, and she does not understand why Roger’s mother would force him to return to his original smell when it made the other little animals run away. Jo is too young to understand the concept of sacrifice, and therefore, believes Roger’s mother to be the villain of the story who deserves punishment.