

Lori Jackson

Sister Thueson

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### Once Upon a Fable

Reality teaches us that big bad wolves don't come knocking on doors, and little pigs don't build houses. Fables, on the other hand, have been told to children for centuries, and embellish upon the use of these talking animals with human-like characteristics. It is this model of story-telling that has taught children about human nature and behavioral cause and effect; it is a means by which the young and old alike have learned simple morals and values. These types of lessons are taught in the story of "The Three Little Pigs." Through the use of literary devices such as repetition, antagonistic characterization, foil and symbolism; the author reinforces the value of wisdom, hard work and preparedness in this simple yet well-loved tale.

The use of repetition supports these values as it helps in establishing characters, ensuring that the reader recognizes key elements, and provides a structure for the many components of the text. Repetition can also be used to create tension, a rising action and then climax; all of which drive home the theme and moral of the story. Within the story of "The Three Little Pigs," there are several examples of different types of repetition. Of course there is the use of the number three, with three little pigs, each building three separate houses out of three different types of material: straw, sticks and bricks. Each of

these different materials builds a repetition as the homes become stronger and represents a transformation in not only the quality of home being built, but in each of the pigs themselves. The anaphora of the wolf huffing, puffing and blowing three different times creates a tension, rising action and then climax when the house is blown down (Hilliwell-Phillipps 69-70). This repetition contributes to the building of the plot, but in the third instance, the climax is not the same, as the house is not blown down. Again, through repetition, the wolf resorts to tempting the clever pig three times, with turnips for his dinner, then with apples, and finally with a visit to the fair (Hilliwell-Phillipps 70-71). Each of these attempts supports the idea that there are temptations in life and using wisdom in our choices will bring safety. By grouping events and objects in repetitions of threes, the author is effectively able to create a reinforcement of the progression and learning process of the pigs, thus illustrating how to ultimately withstand the wolf.

The big bad wolf is portrayed as the antagonist with the allusion of devilish characteristics. This depiction as the tempter of mankind gives the reader insight as to how sinister a threat the wolf is to these pigs: one who tries to trap and tempt them into making poor choices. These temptations are as destructive as a powerful “huff and puff” and can “blow [a] house down” if proper preparation and hard work are not carefully in place prior to the knock on the door (Hilliwell-Phillipps 69). Not only is this adversary destructive, but he is tenacious in his efforts. Again, and again the wolf hunts down each of the little pigs, traps them in their flimsy shelter and devours them as a snack (Hilliwell-Phillipps 69). Even when the house of bricks seems to have him beat, he looks for additional ways to lure the pig from the safety of his home using temptations of delicious food and fun at the fair (Hilliwell-Phillipps 70-71). The wolf as the antagonist helps the

reader understand how life is full of traps and temptations, and further develops the concept that wisdom and hard work are keys in preparing for such obstacles that ultimately protect us from destruction.

Just as wisdom and hard work helped to protect the third pig, the foil of the other brother's lifestyles of idleness and fun highlight the contrast between the two. Unmotivated and delving into their new found freedom, the first two little pigs choose to play rather than labor to establish a solid future. The youngest pig built his house with the smallest amount of effort using straw; the middle pig, while using sticks tried to improve upon what his younger brother had built, gaining perhaps a little wisdom. Still, each rushed to finish so that they could both relax and play together, foolishly seeking a carefree life of indulgence and instant gratification. In contrast, the older and wiser pig chooses brick that is strong and resilient against the winds of adversity. He is able to postpone his desire to play, recognizing the benefit of preparing for his future. While each of the pigs worked to build a home, it is the foil of the younger two pigs that highlight the character of the third pig. It was the oldest pig's hard work, foresight and planning that teaches the ultimate benefit, navigating the wiles of the wolf and inevitably saving his own life.

The journey of life is symbolized throughout the story. From the beginning when the old sow sends her three pigs "out to seek their fortune," a rite of passage so to speak, the journey of life is introduced (Hilliwell-Phillipps 68). As each pig discovers what is of worth to them, they in effect find their fortunes. The first two pigs, seek after a life of ease and pleasure; while the third pig sees great value in the hard work of building a strong home that will last. The lessons that these little pigs learn while seeking their fortunes are symbolic of the lessons of life and what can be learned in that journey. There are,

figuratively, big bad wolfs waiting to devour those that make poor choices, temptations to take the easy route, and satisfaction in maintaining that which we work hard to achieve. The symbolism of life's journey teaches that different behavior can reap different results; and in the end, hard work is rewarded.

“The Three Little Pigs” is a fairy tale where the third little pig lives happily ever after; the consequence to his hard work, wise choices and preparation. It is a simple story that has been shared for generations through written text and folklore, but teaches values and principles that can transform a child's perception of life and reinforce the importance of those morals. These themes are effectively presented through symbolism, foil, antagonistic characterization and repetition; literary devices that connect the common person with the whimsical characters on a level that is applicable and relatable. This connection in turn incorporates the theme well into the understanding of the reader or listener: that life is full of surprises, but hard work, wisdom and preparation will help you in the end.

Works Cited

Hilliwell-Phillipps, James Orchard. "The Three Little Pigs." *English Fairy Tales*. Ed. Joseph  
Jacobs. New York: Dover, 1967. 68-72.