



Class: XII	Department: ENGLISH	Short Answers and Long Answers
QUESTION BANK	Topic: SHOULD WIZARD HIT MOMMY?- by John Updike	TERM 2

Summary:

This story deals with a child's view of the world and the difficult moral questions she raises during the story telling session with her father.

Jack (Jo's father) had become accustomed to or putting it more precisely obligated to telling stories out of his head to his daughter Jo during the evenings and Saturday afternoons. This tradition itself was now two years old and it had started when Jo was two. These stories were almost the same except for some slight variations. It started with a creature usually named Roger (Roger fish, Roger squirrel, Roger chipmunk), who had some problem and went with it to the wise owl. The owl directed him to go to the magician, who would solve his problem in exchange for a few pennies more than the creature had and in the same breath would direct the creature to go to a place where he could find it. Then, the Roger creature would be very happy and would return home just in time to hear the train whistle that brought his daddy home from Boston.

On this particular day, a Saturday, it was time for Jo's nap. So Jack had to tell her a story. So he began his story and asked Jo what the creature should be named. It seemed they had studied about a new animal at school for she enthusiastically said "skunk, Roger skunk". The character was set and so began the story. Jack was now ready to start the story and was filled with creative enthusiasm. The story started with the creature being unable to play and make friends with other creatures because he smelled awful. The creature having no other option went to seek the advice of the wise old owl who directed him to go to the magician. Roger skunk found his way to the magician's house and sought his help. The magician with his magic wand turned the awful smell that Roger had into the smell of roses. The Roger creature then as directed gave the magician the pennies he had and as per the instruction of the magician went to the well to get the extra pennies.

Then Roger skunk went back home. As he reached home his mother was disappointed with Roger Skunk as she thought that it was not right to change one's identity to please their friends. She said real friends are the ones who accept you for who you are and not for who

you want to become. She then took Roger back to the magician and hit the magician with the umbrella she had been carrying. The magician then performed his magic and Roger no longer smelled of roses. After that they returned home just in time to hear the whistle of the train blow that brought Roger Skunk's father home and from that day on, Roger skunk was content in being himself.

Throughout this story Jack wanted to teach his daughter Jo about moral values, but his daughter Jo, who was just a child, reacted differently to the story's ending. She wanted the wizard to hit Roger's mother and let Roger smell of roses and not change him. This was a child's perspective of things. To a child, friends mean everything and they do not understand moral values and the importance of parents.

Jack had faced similar problems like Roger had faced so he was trying to tell Jo that whatever parents say or do for them are in their best interest. But Jo was adamant and wanted another ending for the story.

After the story ended Jack went down to help his wife Clare paint the furniture. When he reached downstairs he saw that the woodwork, a cage of moldings and rails and baseboards all around them, was half old tan and half new ivory and he felt caught in an ugly middle position, and though he as well felt his wife's presence in the cage with him, he did not want to speak with her, work with her or touch her.

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS:

Question 1. What is mother Skunk's role in the lesson?

Answer : Mother Skunk's role in the story is to convince the reader about the narrator's belief that we should never disobey our parents as they know what is best for us. Mother Skunk told Roger never to forget his distinct identity.

Question 2 : What was the basic plot of each story told by Jack?

Answer : The basic plot of each story narrated by Jack was that a small animal, usually named Roger, with some problem went to the wise owl and the owl advised him to go to the wizard, who solved Roger's problem.

Question 3 : What problem did Roger Skunk face when he went to play with his friends? How did he solve it?

Answer : Roger Skunk smelled very badly. As a result, whenever he went to play with his friends, they used to run away. Roger Skunk solved this problem by making the wizard remove the bad smell and give him the smell of roses.

Question 4 : Why did Roger Skunk go to the owl? What advice did he get?

Answer : Roger Skunk was unhappy with his bad smell because of which all the woodland creatures would run away from him and no one would play with him. Thus, Roger Skunk went to the old wise owl to seek a solution for this problem.

Question 5 : Why does Jo call the Skunk's mommy stupid?

Answer : Mommy Skunk took Roger to the Wizard to get his original smell although he liked the new smell. Jo got upset on hearing this as Roger was happy with his new smell and hence called the Skunk's mommy stupid.

Question 6 : How did Jo want the Skunk's story to end?

Answer : Jo wanted the story to end with the Wizard hitting Roger Skunk's mommy with his magic wand as she disapproved of Mother Skunk taking Roger to the Wizard to get back his old foul smell.

Question 7 : Which do you think is a better ending of Roger Skunk's story, Jo's or her father's? Why?

Answer : According to me, Jo's father's ending of Roger Skunk's story was better. This was because parents of a child know what is right for them and Roger Skunk's mother was right in getting Roger's smell changed.

Question 8 : Why does Jack insist that it was the Wizard that was hit and not the mother?

Answer : Jack insisted that it was the Wizard that was hit and not the mother as he wanted to send out a message that parents are the most genuine well-wishers of a child and know what is good for their children.

Question 9 : How was the Skunk's story different from the other stories narrated by Jack?

Answer : The other stories narrated by Jack would end with the animal named Roger taking the help of the Wizard to solve his problem. However, in the Skunk's story, Roger's mother went back to the Wizard and got his smell changed by hitting the Wizard on his head.

Question 10 : Why was Roger Skunk's mother angry? On whom did she pour her anger?

Answer : Roger Skunk's mommy was angry with him because she did not like his going to the Wizard to get his smell changed. She told him that as he was a Skunk, he should smell like one. She poured her anger on the Wizard by hitting him on the head.

Question 11 : What did Jo want the Wizard to do when Mommy Skunk approached him?

Answer : Jo wanted that the Wizard should hit Mommy Skunk right back on her head when she approached him. This was because Jo thought that Mommy Skunk was insensitive towards her son's problem.

Question 12 : Why does Jo insist that her father should tell her the story with a different ending?

Answer : According to Jo, Roger Skunk was happy with the smell of roses. She did not want

him to smell bad. That is why she insisted that her father should re-tell the story with a different ending – i.e. the Wizard does not change Roger’s smell back.

Question 13 : Why did Roger Skunk want to change?

Answer : Roger Skunk smelled very bad. Due to this the other animals teased him and did not make friends or play with him. So he wanted to change.

Question 14 : How did the Wizard help Roger Skunk?

Answer : Roger wanted to smell like roses. So he went to the Wizard’s house who helped him by changing his awful smell to the smell of roses. He also directed the Skunk to the place where he would find the extra pennies to pay the Wizard.

Question 15 : Why did Roger Skunk go in search of the Wizard?

Answer : Roger Skunk went in search of the Wizard so that he could get rid of his awful smell. He had consulted the wise owl about his problem and it was he who had told him to meet the Wizard.

Question 16 : What part of the story did Jack himself enjoy the most and why?

Answer : Jack particularly enjoyed the part when he changed his voice to that of an old man, imitating the Wizard’s voice. He felt being an old man suited him and enjoyed the part as he mixed his childhood’s humiliations and experiences while narrating the story.

Question 17 : Why did Jo think Roger Skunk was better off with the new smell?

Answer : Jo thought that Roger Skunk was better off with the new smell as he was welcomed by the other creatures and made friends with them when he got the new smell.

Question 18 : How did Jo want the Wizard to behave when mommy Skunk approached him?

Answer : Jo wanted the Wizard to hit mommy Skunk back on her head and refuse to change Roger Skunk’s smell when she approached him.

Question 19 : How did Roger Skunk’s mother get his old smell back?

Answer : When Roger Skunk reached home smelling like roses, his mother asked him about it. On hearing the truth, she got infuriated and took him back to the Wizard and got his smell changed by hitting him on his head.

Long Answer Questions (120 – 150 Words)

Question 1 : How did Jack end the Roger Skunk story? How and why did Jo want to change it?

Answer : Jo was an avid listener of stories. She was always aware, inquisitive and alert during the story-telling sessions. Jo was shocked and surprised by the twist in the version of her father’s story and this was utterly unacceptable to her. She emphasised that Roger’s mother was wrong in getting Roger back his original smell. According to her, if her son was

being happily accepted by his playmates, he should have been allowed to retain it. As a child, Jo related to Roger's problem.

She put herself in place of Roger and wanted an ending different from what Jack had given to the story. Jo believed that Mother Skunk should have been hit by the Wizard for being stupid enough to be insensitive to Roger Skunk's feelings.

Question 2 : The same situation can be viewed through two different perspectives. How does 'Should Wizard Hit Mommy?' establish this point through the views of Jack and Jo?

Answer : An adult's view of life is different from that of a child. It is more realistic, practical and matter-of-fact due to an adult's numerous experiences in life. In contrast to this, the child views the world with rose-coloured glasses. It is a perfect world untouched by the hard realities of life. Thus, a child's view is very innocent as compared to that of an adult. Jack, the father of in the story 'Should Wizard Hit Mommy?' told a story which was similar to one of his own childhood experiences. Through it, he wanted to convey to his daughter Jo that whatever parents say or do for their children is in their best interest. However, Jo thought from the narrow perspective of a child and wanted an ending different from what Jack had narrated.

Question 3 : A child's standpoint invariably is different from that of an adult. Justify the statement with reference to the story, 'Should Wizard Hit Mommy?'

Answer : Adults are mature, experienced and have a practical approach. Their responses are tutored and their actions reflect their thoughts. But children are spontaneous with natural and have untutored responses. Jo, a four-year-old child, prefers to live in her world of dreams and fantasies. She would like to take revenge on Skunk's mother and is annoyed because her father refuses to accept her suggestion. The father has a mature perspective and so he views things beyond the 'face-value' and delves into the philosophical and moralistic aspect of the entire situation. The Wizard, according to him, had interfered with nature and so deserved to be punished. Jo completely disagrees with her father. For her the baby Skunk was right and it made perfect sense if the Wizard hit the 'stupid' mommy.

Question 4 : What impression do you form of Jack as a father?

Answer : Jack was a father of a small four-year-old girl, Jo. He was a very loving, caring and affectionate father, who used to tell his daughter a story out of his imagination every day. Since his daughter was very inquisitive and used to ask many questions, he had to be ready with the answers. He was a good storyteller, but was often found caught in an ugly middle position, when he had no answers to his daughter's questions.

As a part of good parenting, he tried his level best to prove his point and satisfy his daughter's queries. To sum up, we can infer that Jack was a very good father, who believed in giving his child the best care and understanding.

Value Based Questions : 6 Marks (120 – 150 Words)

Question 1 : Roger Skunk's mother finds the smell of roses detestable on Roger,

implying that he should accept himself as he is. Adults as well as young people are often misjudging issues, people and circumstances based on appearances. Is an obsession for appearance disallowing us to appreciate our true selves? Explain.

Answer : Roger Skunk desired to smell like roses so that he could make friends and play with other animals. His natural Skunk smell made all others avoid him. However, he as a child did not understand that appearances are deceptive and all is not what it appears to be. Comparison with creatures smelling nice are bound to happen, leading to real matters getting brushed under the carpet. This is a sign of misplaced values, and will ultimately lead to animosity when our true self is exposed. So we should not be obsessed with only appearing good, but should develop an appreciation of our true selves and project this true self for others to understand and appreciate.

Question 2 : What is the moral issue that the story raises?

Answer : The moral issue that the story raises is whether parents are the best judge of what is good for their child or not. A sharp contrast is displayed in the story about the child's viewpoint and an adult's perspective of life. In the story, the child Jo felt that the happiness of being able to make friends is more than anything else and so she wanted the story to end with Roger Skunk smelling of roses. On the other hand, her father ended the story by saying that his mother was right in getting Roger's smell back to its original state, implying to his daughter that parents knew what is best for their children. He also advocates that children should respect their parents' opinions and obey them unquestioningly. Jack also narrated that all the other animals finally accepted Roger, as he was emphasising the importance of a person's originality and individuality.

More Questions and Answers:

1:- Do you think the father in the story is, more or less, an alter ego of the author, as far as the childhood is concerned?

A.1:- John Updike's childhood was tortured by 'psoriasis' and 'stammering' and he had to suffer humiliation and ridicule at the hands of his classmates on account of this. Like him, Jo's father too recalls certain moments of "humiliation of his own childhood". Thus the father more or less, was an alter ego of the author.

Q.2:- What was Roger Skunk's problem? How did he get rid of it?

A.2:- Roger Skunk's was a delightful child. His only problem was that he smelled awful. As a result nobody liked to befriend him and play with him. He got rid of his bad smell with the help of wizard who cast a magic spell to change the smell into that of roses.

Q.3:- How would you describe the state of mind of the father when he finds himself tied to the daughter, while his pregnant wife is painting the woodwork downstairs?

A.3:- The father finds himself caught in the cage as he cannot leave his daughter who he believes is half way between waking and sleeping; on the other hand there is a guilt complex in his mind as his pregnant wife, Clare is shuffling and painting furniture downstairs and he cannot help her. He is trapped in a quagmire of two responsibilities.

Q.4:- How would you interpret the expression, "This was a new phase, just this last month, a realityphase"?

A.4:- Children's physical and mental growth is very rapid. Earlier Jo used to accept her father's words about magic etc. but now she has started questioning, "Are magic spells real?". Since the last few months she has started having apprehensions about such spells. She has become more inquisitive and less credulous.

Q.5:- How did Skunk's mother react to his new smell?

A.5:- Nature keeps its own balance and has its own way. The Skunk's smell is obnoxious for other creatures, but certainly not for other Skunks. Skunks are born with this particular smell and any deviation is violation of nature. So the Mother Skunk does not like the rose smell of Roger Skunk. She believes that what is natural is not disgraceful.

Q.6:- What is the underlying idea behind the wizard's taking the beating and timidly changing the rose smell?

A.6:- By making the wizard take his beating by the Skunk's mother quietly, Jack and through him the author wishes to bring home the idea that mothers are always right and that we should accept what is natural. The wizard also sees the point and timidly changes Skunk's rose smell into his original Skunk smell.

Q.7:- Why does Jo call Skunk's mother a stupid Mommy? What did she want the mother to be punished for?

A.7:- Jo calls Skunk's mother a stupid Mommy because she wants Skunk to get back his original smell instead of the pleasant smell of roses. Moreover, Jo thinks that Skunk's mother is stupid in spanking the wizard and getting him to restore her son's original smell. She wants the mother to be punished for being insensitive, cruel and unfair to her son.

(LONG ANSWERS)

Q.1:- What is the moral issue that the story raises?

A.1:- Although "Should wizard Hit Mommy"? reads like a typical bed time story elders tell little children, it does raise a moral question - Should parents always decide what is best for their children and should children always obey their parents unquestioningly ?. Roger Skunk is a very obedient child but he feels very sad and upset because he smells so awful that nobody wants to befriend him and play with him. One day he gets a chance to get his bad smell replaced with the smell of roses. He feels excited about the change for everyone likes his new smell and readily agrees to play with him. However, Roger's mother does not like the change. For her Roger was better off with his original smell. So, she makes the wizard restore Skunk's original smell. Roger meekly accepts his mother's decision and other children get used to Roger's awful smell and don't complain about it anymore. But the narrow world view of the little girl, Jo likes to spell out the slogan of equality for all. She believes in the axiom 'Tit for Tat'. She feels that mother is wrong in getting her son's original smell back and wants her to be spanked by the wizard for her mistake. Her father, who has modeled Skunk's story on his own story, strongly defends the mother Skunk's decision. Thus the author through this story raises a moral question on how much authority parents should exercise in teaching their children what is wrong, what is right, what they should do and what not. Since there is no single correct answer to the question, he leaves it for the readers to answer it on the basis of their beliefs, cultures and values. Another question that the story seems to raise is — Should we, like Roger Skunk's mother believe in accepting ourselves as nature has made us without being unduly bothered about what others would think of us.

. How was the skunk's story different from the other stories narrated by Jack?

Ans. The skunk's story was different from the other stories narrated by Jack because other stories ended on a happy note. The wizard always resolved the problem by the end of the story, which appealed a lot to Jo. However, Roger Skunk's story had a twisted ending. In this story, the wizard was unable to help Roger Skunk because mother skunk interfered in the process. Jo had not so much interrupted the narration earlier or challenged Jack's authority. It was also the only story, the ending of which was unacceptable to Jo. But above all, unlike any of Jack's stories, the ending of this story remained unresolved.

Q. How does the story, 'Should Wizard Hit Mommy' bear testimony to the fact

that the frustrations faced by adults and their personal experiences often intrude upon their interaction with their children? Elaborate. OR At the end of the storytelling session, why does Jack consider himself 'caught in an ugly middle position'?

Ans. Jack feels that he has been caught in an ugly middle position physically, emotionally as well as mentally. He was conscious of his duties as a father and as a husband. His efforts to make Jo fall asleep proved quite fatiguing. She kept on interrupting him, asking for clarifications, pointing errors and suggesting alternatives. Jo's non-acceptance of the ending of the story is considered an act of defiance by Jack. He is quite taken aback by Jo's behaviour and the things she said. On the other hand, learning that his pregnant wife, Clare, needs his help in the household chores, he is in a hurry to end the story. However, being a loving father, he gives into Jo's demands and extends the story. The result of the extension to the story proves unfruitful and unpleasant for Jack and Clare. Being waiting for her husband to come down and help her with painting of the woodwork, Clare complains that he had told a long story. Jack feels utter weariness and trapped in a cage. He is overcome with a sense of detachment and frustration being caught in the ugly middle position.

Q. How did Jo want the Roger Skunk story to end? Why?

Ans. In Jack's version of the story, Roger Skunk's mommy hits the wizard on his head with her umbrella, and told him to cast a reverse spell on Roger skunk and give him his original smell back. However, Jo did not agree with this ending and suggested an alternate end for the story. According to her, the wizard should have hit mommy back and not change Roger Skunk. To Jo, the wizard was a good person who helps 'Roger Skunk' when he was in trouble and seeking a way out. Witnessing Mommy Skunk's actions, Jo felt that 'stupid Mommy' should have been punished for her unkind behaviour towards the kind wizard. She believed that Mommy Skunk was imposing her will both on Roger Skunk and the wizard without considering her son's fear of not getting accepted by his peers. Jo also thought that Roger Skunk should be allowed to choose his own life even if it meant to get rid of the stink.

Q. In case of a difference of opinion it is generally the adult who has his way. Comment on how Jack justifies the mother skunk's action?

Ans. It is evident from the story that in case of difference of opinion, it is generally the adult who has his or her way. In Roger skunk's story, Mommy skunk is furious at the wizard for making Roger smell of roses. She is not ready to consider that little Roger may not feel comfortable in his original smell. She marches off to the wizard and hits him hard on his head with her umbrella for changing the way Roger smelt. Jack justifies Mommy skunk's action even though Jo disagrees with the story's ending and wants to change it. She suggests that wizard should hit Mommy back, that would be a fair ending. However, Jack says that Mommy skunk is right on her part. In fact, parents are

always right. Jack tries to reason with Jo by saying that Roger Skunk's mother really loved him and wanted to bring him up with real values. Mommy Skunk knew what's best for her son, unlike Roger who was too young to understand what is right or wrong for him. By justifying Mommy Skunk's action, Jackson wants to make Jo understand that adults are experienced therefore, children should respect and listen to their parents.

CHARACTER SKETCHES-

1. JACK

Jack is Jo and Bobby's father. He is married to Jo's mother, Clare, who is six months pregnant with their third child. Jack has been telling Jo a bedtime story every Saturday night since Jo was two years old. Jack doesn't like when ladies don't listen or try opposing him.

Jack is the protagonist of the story 'Should Wizard Hit Mommy?' which examines the issue of parenting, the adult tendency to quell the questioning mind of a child and the belief that the view point of the adult represents the only valid one. Jack is conscious of his duties as a father and husband. He has been telling stories to his daughter Jo since she was two years old, before her Saturday and evening naps, but now two and a half years later he is fatigued and confused by her constant questioning, pointing errors (roger fish instead of skunk), asking for clarifications and suggesting alternatives.

As he is not very creative and imaginative, he keeps one basic storyline. While telling the story, he tries to dramatise and modulates his voice to bring the effect. He himself didn't have a very happy childhood. At times, his own childhood experiences, complexes, miseries and humiliations are brought out in his stories.

He is a caring husband who shares the household work with his wife. At the same time, he seems to be a chauvinist who does not want to be taken for granted by women and doesn't want to bow even before his small daughter. When the story fails to convince his daughter, he uses coercive methods to stick to his point of view. He is not able to understand a child's psychology and exposes the child to the harsh realities of the world at a tender age.

He has the typical parental attitude and opinion that parents know what is best for their children and stifles her objections and amendments shown by his defending the skunk's mother (and indirectly his own). Jack feels caught in an ugly middle position physically, emotionally and mentally. Jack is someone who is not used to his authority being questioned and so is confused by Jo's questioning. Though a loving parent he finds it hard to accept the fact that Jo now has a mind of her own. His insensitivity and impatience come across in his dealings with his daughter, and the fact that an adult's viewpoint is biased by personal experiences. He is authoritarian, chauvinistic and unimaginative.

2. JO

Joanne or Jo is a smart, pampered, loved but sensitive child. Like any other child of four years, she is fond of stories. She is innocent and loves the happy ending stories. She lives in her imaginary world of fairies, magic wands, miracles, etc. and is not prepared for the harsh

realities of life. She feels pain for Roger Skunk when he is rejected by his friends. Fun, games and peer appreciation mean much to her.

She is very logical, intelligent and argumentative. She has her own mind and cannot accept that mothers can be so cruel as to hurt their children. When she is not able to persuade him to change the ending of the story, she urges her father to tell her another story.

Jo, like a young smart kid, is full of questions. She is learning new things every day in the school and is very inquisitive. It gives her maturity. She is brave enough not to accept something that she doesn't believe in.

Jo resembles her mother – has her blue eyes; grins like her mother as she does at cocktail parties.