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PHIL 2143: Philosophy for Children

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April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020

### **Book Module and Discussion Framework:**

*I Love my New Toy* by Mo Willems

#### **Summary**

When Piggie got a new toy, she was excited to share it with Elephant. Elephant threw it way to high, so it broke when it landed back on the ground. Piggie got sad and mad at Elephant, until squirrel found the toy and found a new way to play with it.

*Note:* The book does not specify the gender of the characters, but I will use ‘he’ for Elephant, ‘she’ for Piggie and ‘he’ for squirrel for the purpose of this discussion.

#### **Guidelines for Philosophical Discussion**

The human need for friendship is fundamental, yet they are the hardest to maintain. Childhood is a critical period for individuals who start making friends, finding out their interests, likes, dislikes, etc. Kids start exploring what it means to be friends with someone, how the ‘rules of friendship’ work. Nonetheless, there are a lot of complex issues that come up in such relationships. Sharing, arguing and forgiving are three of the most common concepts in young friendships. For the purpose of this discussion, sharing will be identified as lending a friend a toy, a pen or any tangible object for any given reason, an idea that is highly encouraged by society, and caregivers especially. Although uncomfortable, arguing and fighting with friends is a very normal occurrence, and sometimes even considered healthy for a relationship. Finally, forgiveness is also highly encouraged. Parents of young children will usually push and teach them to be more forgiving and more understanding, with the purpose of creating a healthy environment for their child.

Evidently, the lines can get very blurry; there is a lot of internal debates on what to share or not, what to forgive or not, and what can be characterized as an argument or fight in a friendship. In *I Love My New Toy!*, Mo Willems brings into question the purpose of fighting and forgiving, as well as the need for sharing.

The first set of questions will focus on sharing in friendships, assessing what it means to share, why do people share, what criteria does one follow to evaluate whether or not to share their things. Some people might have a strong stance against sharing, having a “what’s mine is mine” attitude. This may be justified by the fear of losing their things or letting go, or by the need to be in control of their possessions. Other people might be on the opposite side of the spectrum, believing that “sharing is caring”. This might be due to the desire to play with others or to show other kids their own toys. At a young age, children are still trying to understand their peers’ and friends’ intentions, causing emotional internal conflicts: “do I share my toy with them? Will they give it back to me? What happens if they don’t?”

The second set of questions will focus on the value placed on a tangible object, or in this case, a toy versus the value of friendships and relationships. It aims to assess the criterion of the toy that makes it shareable or not: is it a prize? Was it a special gift? Is it a rare toy? Some people might evaluate the value of their toy based on how much it personally means to them, or even to others, how precious it is, how common or unique, while others might simply look at how much it costs. The other criteria that a lot of people will take into consideration is the person they are sharing their toy with; most people tend to share their possessions with the people closest to them. This is often justified by a trusting, long-term, established relationship. This section will also examine the validity of the toy after it has been shared and used. In this book discussion, one of the main points to bring across is that, in a lot of cases, a toy can still be viable. Willems tried to convey that by bringing in an outside-perspective; one that is not directly involved in the Piggie-Elephant friendship.

The third set of questions will focus on forgiveness. Did Elephant deserve forgiveness? Why didn't Piggie just stay mad at him? Some people might agree with Piggie, and see the positive outcome of the situation, while others would still be upset, and decide not to grant forgiveness. This could lead to self-reflection and introspection to assess how likely one is to forgive their friend for a wrongdoing, but also to understand whether or not they meant to hurt or do harm by them.

Aside from the values and standards of friendship, this book could also be analyzed through a different lens, one that focuses on the idea of waste and recycling. In fact, the squirrel who provided a new perspective for Piggie and Elephant also served to show that the original toy did not have to go to waste. The squirrel, in this case, was a recycler: he created a new toy, using parts of an old one. This section could lead children to think about ways they can recycle their belongings, to either change or improve their use. It can also expand into a discussion about the current debates surrounding waste and global pollution.

### Discussion Framework

#### Concept Map of Big Ideas:

Friendship: the relationship between two or more people that is unique to those people, includes feelings of love, admiration and care

Forgiveness: accepting one's faults or mistakes

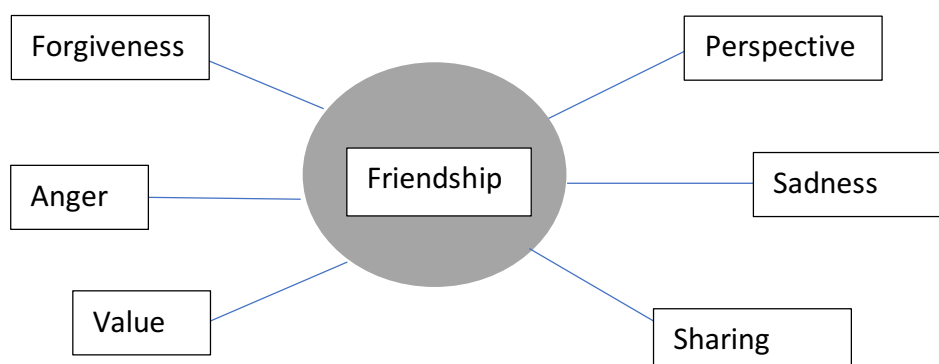
Anger: feeling annoyed and hostile

Perspective: the way or attitude you take looking at something

Sadness: feeling unhappy, upset

Sharing: to use or enjoy something with others, or to give something willingly to another person

Value: the importance of something, or a person's judgment of what's important in life.



**Questions You'll Ask Students Before Reading:**

1. How important are your toys to you?
2. Have you ever broken one of your toys? How did you feel?
3. How important are your friends to you?
4. Have you ever broken one of your friends' toys? How did you feel? How do you think they felt?
5. How do you decide when you have to apologize to someone?

**Sharing in Friendships**

1. Should Piggie have shared her toy? Why or why not?
2. Is it important to share in friendships? Why or why not?
3. Have you ever regretted sharing your toys (or something else) with your friends?
4. If you own a toy or something else, do you have to share it with your friends?
5. How do you decide whether or not to share your toys?
6. Did Elephant want to break the toy? Was it intentional?
7. Did Elephant do something wrong in breaking the toy?
8. Does not sharing make you a bad friend?

**Feelings and Forgiveness**

1. Do you think Elephant regretted playing the toy?
2. Do you think apologizing was enough? What would you have done?
3. Why did Piggie say she didn't care about Elephant's apology?
4. Should Piggie have asked Elephant if he wanted to play with the new toy? Why or why not?
5. Why didn't Elephant want to play it?

**Value of Toys vs. Friends (Tangibles vs. Relationships)**

1. Did Elephant do something wrong in breaking the toy?
2. When did Piggie decide to forgive Elephant?
3. Do you think the break and snap toy is the same as the original toy? Is it Better? Is it Worse?

4. Why didn't Elephant want to play with the break and snap toy?
5. Was the toy as important to Piggie at the end as it was in the beginning? Why or why not?
6. What do you think is more important or valuable, your toys or your friendships?

### Waste and Recycling

1. When something breaks, does it have to go to waste?
2. Did the broken toy go to waste?
3. Is the break and snap toy better or worse than the original one? Why?
4. Is the recycled object still considered a toy?
5. What makes something a toy?
6. What can we do with waste?

### Story Matrix

	How did Piggie feel	How did Elephant feel
<b>Before the toy broke: When she showed Elephant her new toy and asked him to play with it</b>	<b>Happy to be sharing her toy with Elephant – excited Proud</b>	
<b>When the toy broke: When Elephant threw the toy and broke it</b>		
<b>After the toy broke: When Elephant apologized</b>		
<b>When Squirrel found the toy</b>		
<b>After Squirrel found the toy</b>		