

Family Paideia Seminar Plan

Text: “The Elves and the Shoemaker” by the Grimm Brothers

Ideas, Values: Generosity, Kindness, Mystery, Need vs. Desire, Wealth

Pre-Seminar Content

Big Ideas Chat:

What is the difference between things we need and things we want?

Have a brief chat about the difference, and then make two lists: (1) things we need, and (2) things we want. Talk about the difference between the two lists.

1st Read:

Read the story aloud while family and/or friends listen. Check for any words that are unknown, to talk about them after you finish reading the story.

Vocabulary:

Discuss the unfamiliar words in the story. Explain what they mean, figure them out from the sentence, or look them up in a dictionary. Be sure to include the following words in your discussion: *conscience, purchaser, pierce, waistcoat, breeches, spruce, dandy, cobbler.*

2nd Read:

Have someone else read the story again, and then have each person in the group choose a different scene in the story and sketch the scene. Lay the sketches out in the sequence of the story.

Pre-Seminar Process:

* Share why you are having the discussion.

(Sample script from our classroom Paideia Seminars: Modify to fit your household.)

*“A Paideia seminar is a collaborative, intellectual dialogue about a text, facilitated with open ended questions.”*

*“The main purpose of seminar is to arrive at a fuller understanding of the textual ideas and values, of ourselves, and of each other.”*

* Describe what you want to accomplish.
* Set a Family Goal.
* To balance the talk time
* To refer to the text
* To ask a question
* To speak out of uncertainty
* To build on others’ comments

Seminar Questions:

* Opening (Identify main ideas from the text):
* Think of a word to describe the shoemaker and his wife at the beginning of the story. Have younger kids share first if they feel comfortable, and go around by age. (Don’t share why until everyone has had a chance to answer.)
* What in the story made you choose that word? (anyone can share)
* Core (Analyze textual details):
* Why do you think the elves chose to help the shoemaker?
* Why do you think the elves came at midnight?
* Did the shoemaker and his wife deserve the help of the elves? Why or why not?
* Why do you think the climax of this story occurs at Christmas time?
* Why do you think the elves never came back to the shoemaker’s house after they had their clothes and shoes?
* Closing (Personalize and apply the ideas):
* If the elves were to come to your house at midnight, what would you like them to do for you? Why?

Post-Seminar Process:

*“Ask each person what they liked most about the discussion.”*

* Have the family do a quick check of the discussion goal.

Post Seminar Content:

* Transition to Writing:

Look back at the sketches you made after the 2nd Read. Let everyone check to see if they want to add details to their drawings based on what they heard, said, and thought during the seminar.

* Writing Prompt:

Write a story about a time you needed something, and it was given to you by magical beings.

* Brainstorm, Getting ready to write:

Together, look back at the list of needs and wants that you created during the Big Ideas chat. Have each individual identify one thing they need in order to have a secure, happy life. Discuss how that thing could be delivered by magical beings like elves.

* Writing:

Plan the outline of your own stories based on a pattern like the series of sketches made after the 2nd Read. Write your stories!

This Paideia Lesson Plan was created by:

Name: Terry Roberts and Wendy Ikoku

Organization: National Paideia Center

\*Text is attached if open sourced.

\*Text is cited if it needs to be procured.

The Elves and the Shoemaker[[1]](#footnote-1) (1814)

by Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm

There was once a shoemaker who through no fault of his own had become so poor that at last he had only leather enough left for one pair of shoes. At evening he cut out the shoes which he intended to begin upon the next morning, and since he had a good conscience, he lay down quietly, said his prayers, and fell asleep.

In the morning, when he had said his prayers and was preparing to sit down to work, he found the pair of shoes standing finished on his table. He was amazed and could not understand it in the least.

He took the shoes in his hand to examine them more closely. They were so neatly sewn that not a stitch was out of place, and were as good as the work of a master hand.

Soon afterwards a purchaser came in and, as he was much pleased with the shoes, he paid more than the ordinary price for them, so that the shoemaker was able to buy leather for two pairs of shoes with the money.

He cut them out in the evening, and the next day with fresh courage was about to go to work. But he had no need to, for when he got up the shoes were finished, and buyers were not lacking. These gave him so much money that he was able to buy leather for four pairs of shoes.

Early next morning he found the four pairs finished and so it went on. What he cut out at evening was finished in the morning, so that he was soon again in comfortable circumstances and became a well-to-do man.

Now it happened one evening not long before Christmas, when he had cut out some shoes as usual, that he said to his wife, “How would it be if we were to sit up tonight to see who it is that lends us such a helping hand?”

The wife agreed and lighted a candle, and they hit themselves in the corner of the room behind the clothes which were hanging there. At midnight came two little naked men who sat down at the shoemaker’s table, took up the cut-out work, and began with their tiny fingers to stitch, sew, and hammer so neatly and quickly that the shoemaker could not believe his eyes. They did not stop till everything was quite finished and stood complete on the table. Then they ran swiftly away.

The next day the wife said, “The little men have made us rich, and we ought to show our gratitude. They were running about with nothing on, and must freeze with cold. Now I will make them little shirts, coats, waistcoats, and hose, and will even knit them a pair of stockings. And you shall make them each a pair of shoes.”

The husband agreed. And at evening, when they had everything ready, they laid out the presents on the table and hid themselves to see how the little men would behave.

At midnight they came skipping in and were about to set to work. But instead of the leather ready cut out, they found the charming little clothes.

At first they were surprised, then excessively delighted. With the greatest speed they put on and smoothed down the pretty clothes, singing:

“*Now we’re boys so fine and neat,*

*Why cobble more for others’ feet?”*

Then they hopped and danced about, and leapt over chairs and tables and out the door. Henceforward they came back no more, but the shoemaker fared well as long as he lived, and had good luck in all his undertakings.

1. This version appeared in a 1945 collection published by Grosset & Dunlap, translated by Mrs. E. V. Lucas, Lucy Crane, and Marian Edwards. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)