

The Turtle Who Just Couldn't Keep His Mouth Shut
A story of self control

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Snappy the Snapping Turtle was always snapping at anything or anyone who came near him. Even those who just happened to say, "Good morning," nearly got their heads bitten off. He was so angry that soon there was no one in the pond who would go near him. You might be grumpy, too, if you were always stuck in the mud.

But everything changed the day a pair of swans on their way home spotted the little pond where Snappy lived and decided to drop in for a rest. Snappy had never seen anything so beautiful.

It was hard for the pond residents to believe but Snappy actually made friends with the swans. He'd look forward to their visits and tales of the lands far away with lots of green grass and plenty of water. He longed to see those places, too. He would keep the swans busy for hours asking questions. They would smile at each other and take turns patiently answering him. And Snappy even thanked them at the end of the day.

Then one year it didn't rain at all. The pond began to dry up under the heat of the burning sun. Everyone in the area, both the people and animals, were starving. The birds were leaving to find a better home.

The swans decided that it was time for them to leave as well. So they came to say a sad goodbye to their friend.

Poor Snappy couldn't believe that they would leave him behind. The swans, too, wondered how they could save their friend. But everyone knew that turtles can't fly.

Snappy came up with an idea. He told the swans to get a long stick. "My snappy jaws are strong enough so that if you fly slowly you could hold the two ends and carry me along. Once I clamp down on something, nothing escapes my grip."

But the swans were worried. What if Snappy couldn't control himself and opened his mouth? He would lose his grip and fall down. They made him promise not to open his mouth, no matter what.

So off the three friends flew. Higher and higher, over hills, valleys, fields and plains they went. "Wow, I never thought I'd be able to see these things," thought Snappy. But no matter what new things he saw he still kept his promise and held on tight.

Birds would fly by and laugh, "Hey a flying turtle! I've never seen a turtle bird." But the swans told their friend just to ignore them. "They're just jealous. Don't pay any attention. Just keep your mouth shut and enjoy the ride."

But then, they flew over a city. The people of the city were amazed to see such a strange sight. They laughed and clapped their hands. Snappy tried his best to ignore them. But then someone shouted, "Look at the swans carrying that silly turtle." That made Snappy angry. "Why are you foolish people making such a racket?" he snapped. He had forgotten his promise. He lost his grip on the stick. Down, down, down he fell and crashed to the ground, because he just couldn't keep his mouth shut.

Thoughts:

So my fellow travelers, on this journey we have discovered that the most important thing to control is ourselves.

Essential Question:

Why is it important to control our selves and not be distract by what others say or do?

Background:

This story from India was adapted from the Panchatantra, "The Tortoise and the Geese." Most people don't realize that many of the stories from the Panchatantra have spread all over the globe. Some appear in Aesop's Fables. Even more interesting is their origin. The stories were created to teach the princes of a local king how to be good rulers. The king was very sad because his sons had no interest in managing his kingdom. Finally the king offered a reward for anyone who could teach the boys. All the teachers failed. Finally a great saint came into the court. People laughed at the way he was dressed. "I'll teach the boys," he said. Everyone was amazed. So he made up these stories using animal characters, and within a short time, the boys had learned the art of statesmanship.

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