

My Daughter, The Fox

Jackie Kay

After-Reading Activities

1. Put the events in the correct order:

... The narrator and her mother tiptoed into the bedroom where Anya was sleeping in her crib for her daytime nap.

... The narrator extended her maternity leave for an extra three months.

... The scans didn't seem to pick anything up.

... Mother had to empty the room of everything that could be damaged.

... On the stroke of midnight the narrator gave birth to a baby fox.

... The narrator pulled the top bolt and then the bottom one. She opened the door and let her out into the night.

... Mother felt the foxes wanted to claim Anya as one of their own.

... The narrator saw a dead fox on the hard shoulder.

... The driver put on the sirens and raced screaming through the dark streets.

... Anya chased the rabbit, killed it, brought it back and buried it, saving it for a hungry day.

2. Find the lines in the text that develop the following themes.

- the narrator's unconditional love for her daughter;
- the otherness of the daughter;
- the narrator's loneliness (both before she gave birth to Anya and after);
- the narrator's attitude to forgiveness;
- the animal side of humans and the human side of animals.

5. Fill in the gaps with appropriate prepositions.

It was the same look people's faces when I took Anya in her pram. I'd bought a great big Silver Cross pram with a navy hood. I always kept the hood to keep the sun or the rain People could never resist sneaking a look a baby in a pram. I doubt that many had ever seen daughters mine before. One old friend, shocked and fumbling something to say, said 'She looks so like you.' I glowed pride. 'Do you think so?' I said, squeaking pleasure. She did look beautiful, my daughter in her Silver Cross pram, the white of her blanket the red of her cheeks.

6. Answer the questions:

- Why do people usually **sneak a look at** something? What's the difference between sneaking a look and just looking?
- When do people **fumble for** something to say? Do you often have to do it? What else can you **fumble for**?
- Why did the author glow with pride and **squeak with pleasure**? What can make you do the same?
- What did the author's husband mean by saying that she was **off her rocker**?
- Why did he say that he wouldn't pay a penny **towards his daughter's keep**? Do parents in your country often behave in the same way?
- Why do some parents **dump** or **disown** their children?
- Why did the narrator's colleagues **clam up** when she tried to tell them about Anya's **antics**?

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Creative Writing And Project Work

1. Re-write the story from the point of view of 1) Anya the fox; 2) the narrator's mother; 3) the narrator's friends or colleagues.
2. Research the issue of differently abled children and read the forums where their parents exchange information and seek advice. Then students can be asked to write a letter from the mother of the fox and write a reply from some other parent with a similar experience or an agony aunt. For examples go to http://www.mumsnet.com/Talk/special_needs/1180281-Life-with-an-autistic-son
3. It is written in the story: '**no fox ever came off too well in the tales or stories**'. Is it the same in your culture? What is your attitude to foxes? Compare the image of the fox in British and your national culture. Search for the information on this subject and make a presentation in class.



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Discussion

Task 1. *Read the following abstract from an interview with Jackie Kay, where she tells the readers about the situation when she was seriously misunderstood by her adopted mother. What do you think caused the misunderstanding?*

“I came out to her when I was 17. The language I used was conditional. I said, ‘How would you feel if I were to tell you I was a?’ and she said, ‘I would be very upset.’ I asked, ‘Why?’, and she said, ‘You would be becoming something I don’t know and understand. You wouldn’t be Jackie any more.’ She’s very relaxed about it now, though.”

Task 2. *Answer the questions:*

1. In the story, a human mother literally gives birth to a fox cub which is impossible in real life. What do you think might have made the author choose this kind of plot for her story?
2. Does the mother in the story hesitate to accept the ‘otherness’ of her child? What do you think are the reasons for her readiness to accept it? Would she adopt such a child / a fox?
3. In the story, what are the advantages and disadvantages of having a child different from others? Do you think it is the same in reality? How does the narrator benefit from the situation?
4. What does she find most difficult in raising a child? What do you think is the most difficult?
5. In the story, the father of the child refuses to see or support her. Do you think this is because:
 - a) the author finds this kind of behaviour natural?
 - b) she is prejudiced against men?
 - c) she finds the idea of giving birth to a child different from others repulsive?

Can you think of any other reasons?

Task 3. *One of the issues raised by the story is unconditional love of parents, however different their child might be. The following poem was written by an American mother who gave birth to a child with a Downs syndrome.*

HEAVEN'S VERY SPECIAL CHILD

A meeting was held quite far from Earth
It was time again for another birth.
Said the Angels to the Lord above -
"This special child will need much love".
Her progress may be very slow
Accomplishment she may not show.
And she'll require extra care
From the folks she meets down there.
She may not run or laugh or play
Her thoughts may seem quite far away
So many times she will be labeled
'different,' 'helpless' and disabled.
So, let's be careful where she's sent.
We want her life to be content.
Please, Lord, find the parents who
Will do a special job for you.
They will not realize right away
The leading role they're asked to play
But with this child sent from above
Comes stronger faith and richer love.
And soon they'll know the privilege given
In caring for this gift from Heaven.
Their precious charge, so meek and mild
Is heaven's very special child.

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What do "special children" and "special parents" mean in this context? What do you agree or disagree with? Do you know such special parents and children?

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Language Work

Task 1

Animal Metaphors

Names of animals are often used in metaphors to describe people and their actions. In some cases animal metaphors can be used as

nouns: jailbird, foxhole, foxtrot, calf-love;

adjectives: moth-eaten, harebrained, henpecked;

verbs: to horse around, to monkey around.

You can use the names of the following animals to complete these sentences. Some of them can be used more than once.

dog bug fish goose beaver bee fly fox

1. When I heard that Chris was coming and that he wanted to talk to me, I felt like because I didn't want to deal with him.
2. When Jim showed me his new car, I could tell that he for a compliment.
3. He gets to work every day before eight. He's a real eager
4. Our aunt obviously has a in her bonnet about etiquette, but we're very fond of her.
5. Before getting down to work he washes his hands about five times. He's a bit of a queer
6. The playground looks disgusting with all this rubbish. The town council has to find out who these litter are.
7. No wonder he did it! He is as cunning as a
8. When the boy first came to stay with us, he my steps everywhere – he didn't want to be left on his own.
9. Susan is telling Jim that she's leaving him tonight. I'd love to be a on the wall during that conversation.
10. Whenever I hear this particular piece of music, I get bumps all over!

Task 2

Animal Sounds

Look at the words in bold. They each describe a sound made by an animal. Many of them are onomatopoeic, i.e. they sound like the noises they make. Which animals are referred to in the following sentences?

1. The howling of the wind made my fears stronger.
2. You are barking up the wrong tree.
3. She turned her head slowly and hissed something back in reply.
4. When a girl stroked her, she purred loudly.
5. "What happened?" he croaked from a dry throat.
6. Dad looked funny and grunted, "No, no, never".

Task 3 A

Match the idioms & idiomatic expressions with the word "fox":

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| 1) old fox | a) to be crafty; to pretend |
| 2) crazy like a fox | b) a cunning and experienced person who gets what they want, often in an underhand way |
| 3) as sly as a fox | c) behaving in a foolish, frivolous, or uncomprehending manner as a ruse for concealing clever deeds or deeper intentions |
| 4) to play (the) fox | d) a sly, cunning person |

Task 3 B

Complete the sentences using the idioms with the word "fox". You may need to change word forms.

- 1) Uncle Joe is _____ here – he's been in this business for ages and has never been caught red-handed!
- 2) Mike took his relationship with Mary seriously, but it turned out that she was just _____ all the time.
- 3) Yesterday I nearly believed that Sean was really upset about it, but he was simply _____ again.
- 4) "How did he get away with the fraud?" – "Don't you understand? I've told you before that he's always been _____ ! He always gets what he wants."
- 5) Sometimes it seems that Jenny acts without any plan but later, when she succeeds, you understand that she is very clever indeed – in fact, she is _____ .

Task 4

In her short story Jackie Kay uses the word “fox” for a female fox. However, there is a special term, “vixen”, for a female fox. Find information about the use of this word in the dictionary. In your opinion, what influenced the author’s choice?

Can you think of the other words of feminine gender denoting animals?

lion –

tiger –

cock –

buck –

tomcat –

bull –

billy goat –

stallion –

boar –

What do you think about such gender-marked terms and their connotations? The words of which gender have more negative/positive connotations? Why? Use dictionaries to find more information about such connotations.