

## Discussing Payshapes and the Bear by Lucina Kathmann

### 1. The Polar Bear's Mass

Characters:

Payshapes

The Bear

A dragon, a big, strong, reliable one

A huge polar bear, pastor of the Bears' church

Many other bears

*In this story, Payshapes and the Bear find out about a special church for bears, arrange their travel and go to attend a service near the North Pole, an unusual pilgrimage.*

Questions:

1. Why can't the Payshapes and the Bear go to a regular church in a human town?
2. What was the problem Payshapes had in the Bears' church?
3. What do you think a dragonbreath treatment is?
4. Do you think that humans were better at accepting bears, or that bears were better at accepting humans at their churches? Why do you think so?

### 2. Choir of Dragons

Characters:

Payshapes

The Bear

An old dragon choirmaster

A few other animals who happen to be near

*Payshapes and the Bear find out that the dragons have been rehearsing in a choir in preparation for a singing competition. The dragons sing beautifully but they are so poor at cooperation that it is not clear whether it is worth the effort to get them to form a chorus, particularly since their shenanigans upset the Bear's bees.*

Questions:

1. How did Payshapes and the Bear find out about the dragons' choir?
2. How do these dragons behave?
3. Have you seen others behave in this way? In your class? In your family?
4. Describe some behaviors you have seen that reminds you the dragons.

### 3. Payshapes and the Oracle

Characters in this story:

Payshapes

The Bear

A Guinea Pig

A very old dragon

A younger dragon, daughter of the old dragon

Many other animals who have gone to see the oracle

*There is a voice coming from the ground in a place in Payshapes' forest. It seems like an oracle. It says short sayings, apparently at random. Many animals attribute supernatural powers to it. We find out the cause.*

Questions:

1. In ancient times there were some well-known religious shrines called oracles that people went to for prophesies about the future. What is the oracle in Payshapes' forest?
2. Some animals believe this oracle has supernatural powers. What do you think?
3. Does this oracle tell prophesies about the future?
4. Have you heard some of the short sayings that came out of that oracle? If so, where did you hear them? Do you like them?
5. All cultures have these little words of wisdom, called "adages" or just "sayings." Do you know some other familiar sayings that are not in the story?
6. What is wrong with the old dragon? Does something similar sometimes happen to old human beings?

### 4. Rondo

Characters:

Payshapes

The Bear

Many other animals who arrive and take part

*Payshapes finds the Bear walking around in a circle. He says he is trying to get back "on the memory path." Payshapes follows him and soon many other animals join in. They have a wonderful time dancing together but later we find that the Bear's memory is as bad as ever.*

Questions:

1. Do you think that going around in a circle helped the Bear remember?
2. Do you think it could possibly help someone to remember?
3. What was the walking around good for in this story?

## 5. The Sea Serpent Goes out to Sea

Characters:

Payshapes

The Bear

A huge Sea Serpent

Many dragons

Many beavers

*In this long story, the Sea Serpent has grown too big to stay in Dragon Lake. She must be brought to a place where she can get out to sea so she can swim to her new home. This very difficult task requires the precise cooperation of many animals.*

Questions:

1. What was the Sea Serpent's problem?
2. List some of the characters who had to cooperate to get her out to sea.
3. This story involves a lot of cooperation, yet when her big day came, was the Sea Serpent very good at cooperating? Why or why not?

## 6. Payshapes Gets His Birth Certificate

Characters:

Payshapes

The Bear

A tapir

A mole, the official at the civil registry

A few other animals who happen by

*Payshapes has doubted whether he exists. The tapir thinks this comes from not having a birth certificate. We follow Payshapes and the Bear to the civil registry and watch how to get one. The Bear finds it interesting for an unexpected reason.*

Questions:

1. Have you seen your own birth certificate?
2. The certificate or a copy of it is in your school's office. If a person shows up at school, it's obvious that they were born, so why are birth certificates necessary?

## 7. Do Bees Have Blue Souls: Payshapes Opines

Characters:

Payshapes

The Bear

*Payshapes tries to make sense of the Bear's firmly-held opinion that bees have blue souls.*

Questions:

1. Is it possible that something that makes no sense in most ways still makes sense in an artistic way?
2. This story is different from the other stories in Payshapes and the Bear because very little happens in it. Instead, we watch the way Payshapes thinks something through, with a little help from the Bear. Have you ever thought about something a long time and come to a better understanding of it? Describe your experience.

## 8. Shooting the Pipeline

Characters:

Payshapes

The Bear

Paychops, Payshapes' cousin

A whale

*The story of what happened to Payshapes' rather remote cousin, a surfer who died very young.*

Questions:

1. Have you ever been surfing? If so, describe what it was like. If now, what do you think it would be like to be a surfer?
2. Shooting the pipeline is a real surfer's stunt. Do you know what a ballet *grand jeté* is? What does it look like? Why is that term used in this story?
3. What do you think of the whale's claim that she did not swallow Paychops?
4. If you were a member of the jury and the whale was tried for murder, how would you vote?

## 9. Bear Apollo

Characters:

The Bear

Payshapes

Other animals who happen to be near

*The Bear has found a book with a photo of a beautiful bear in Finland which makes him feel terrible about his own body. Payshapes is terribly upset because his friend is crying.*

PS: The author has this book; *This is Finland* is a real book.

Questions:

1. The Bear, like many others, worries about his looks. Is this important for bears? For boys? For girls? For anybody?
2. If it is not important, why do so many fuss so much about it?
3. In this story the Bear compares himself to a picture book model. Do you know others who have done the same ?
4. Are there industries, like cosmetics, diet and plastic surgery, which cater to this feeling? Do you think they do any good?

## 10. Christmas Story

Characters:

Payshapes

The Bear

Three Kings and the animals they ride

A bartender

A turtle, who obstructs the way to the phone

*The Three Kings begin calling Payshapes and the Bear for help with their yearly task of preparing and distributing Christmas gifts. They always have trouble but the situation seems to be getting worse. Last year they mistakenly went into a bar looking for the Baby Jesus. It was quite a disaster.*

Questions:

1. Had you heard of the custom of the Kings bringing Christmas gifts? Where did you hear or read about this custom?
2. These Three Kings are not very much like the ones in the Bible story. Is it OK for them to be different in a Payshapes story?
3. Fiction is the word we give for made up stories; Payshapes and the Bear are characters in fiction. Do we have the same rules for fiction as we do for nonfiction writing?

## 11. In Memory of Sir Spots

Characters:

Payshapes

The Bear

The memory of Sir Spots

A guinea pig

Scales, a dragon

Many other dragons

A helpful dragon

A pig

*Payshapes wants to make a memorial to Sir Spots, a leopard who died, whose skin Payshapes still wears. A tree has fallen obstructing the way to the cemetery and it is hard to find a dragon who will help move it away. The Bear finds the right finishing touches for the memorial.*

Questions:

1. Did you know about the custom of Day of the Dead, the special day for honoring our dead? If so, describe this custom. It is a very popular event in Mexico. It comes on November 2, soon after Hallowe'en. Do you like the idea of honoring our dead?
2. Are you surprised that there are bad words in other languages and even in the dragons' language? What do you think about their attitude toward work? Do they really hate it or is all their complaining mainly some sort of a bluff?
3. Some people agree to be organ donors. Some give organs they can live without to those who need them while they are still alive. Many more will their organs to those who need them after they die. Could we call Sir Spots an organ donor? (Remember, skin is a physical organ.)

## 12. As Easy as Falling on a Bear

Characters in this story:

Payshapes

The Bear

Matilde, the Bear's sister

Many otters, including a grandmother

The youngest otter

Her brother

Many other animals around the lake who are interested in Matilda's visit

*On a rainy day, Payshapes and the Bear and the Bear's visiting sister play on the otter's mudslide. Their size could make this dangerous. One little otter will not wait for the big bears to clear the landing place. This problem leads to the creation of a new sport, falling on a bear.*

Questions:

1. In this story, on the first day of the Bear's sister Matilde's visit, it rains. Our friends don't give up, though. They think of something special to do on a rainy day. What do you do on rainy days?
2. What do you think of the littlest otter? Does she remind you of anyone you know?