

THE MASTER POTTER

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Jerome Quincy was his name. He lived in a small town in the mountains far from the noise and confusion of the city. He was a master potter. He had learned his skills from his father, who had also learned from his father. No one could make pottery like him. Every family in his town had at least one of his pieces of pottery. He sold his pottery throughout the region. He had orders to buy his pottery faster than he could make it.

Jerome didn't have any children. His wife had died when he was young, and he had never remarried. His life was his work.

Jerome was getting older now. His eyesight was not as good as it used to be, but every day he could be found in his pottery shop creating new pieces of stoneware. His hands were bent and twisted from years of turning the clay, but they still had a gentleness about them as he molded the clay to be exactly the way he wanted it to be.

One day, as Jerome was working in his shop, a boy came running inside and hid behind the door.

Shortly after that, three boys came inside looking for him. They looked over at the old man as he worked.

"Did you see a boy come in here?" the boys asked.

"Nope, no one has been in here for some time," Jerome responded, never looking up from his work.

The boys left and ran off toward the town looking for the boy.

After a few moments, Jerome looked over the top of his glasses at the boy who was sitting on the floor behind the door. He looked like he was ready to cry.

“Why are those boys looking for you?” Jerome asked.

“They’re always picking on me. They always want to beat me up,” the young man answered.

“What’s your name son?” Jerome asked.

“Robby, Robby Thompson,” he answered.

“So, Robby, why do they want to hurt you?” Jerome asked.

“They don’t like me. They tease me because I’ve got red hair. They call me Ginger Boy, and I don’t like it. I try to make them stop, but they keep teasing me. Today, I threw water on them to make them stop, but that just made them angrier at me,” Robby told his story to Jerome.

“Why’d you run in here?” Jerome questioned him.

“I don’t know. It was the first place that looked safe, I guess,” Robby responded through his tears.

Robby sat on the floor for a long time and watched Jerome as he transformed the clay from a formless lump into a beautiful new vase. It seemed like magic as Jerome’s fingers gently stretched the clay and changed it into something of great beauty.

“How did do you do that?” Robby asked.

“Come over here, and I’ll show you,” Jerome responded.

Robby got up off the floor and walked to the table where Jerome was spinning the clay. His right foot moved up and down as it turned the platter that the clay sat on. He had a bowl of water next to him that he used to wet his fingers. By pinching the mud and then pulling it gently upward, the clay took on a new shape.

“Do you want to try?” asked Jerome.

“No, I think I would just ruin it,” Robby step back as he answered.

“Really, come over here. I want you to come and try. If you make a mistake, it’s easy to start over,” Jerome said as he moved off his stool and waved his hand at Robby to sit down.

Robby was not sure if he could do it, but he finally sat down and looked at the

clay.

“Now what?” Robby asked.

“First, put your foot on the peddle, and then start moving your foot up and down,” Jerome directed Robby.

Robby did as he was told, and the tray began to spin.

“OK, now put some water on your hands, and start to pull the clay upward,” Jerome explained.

“Like this?” Robby asked as he began to work with the soft wet clay in front of him.

Just then, the clay fell over and the piece was destroyed. Robby threw up his hands in frustration.

“I messed up. I’m not good at this.” Robby said as he stopped to look at the clay that was now lying in a pile.

“It’s OK, it takes time to learn to feel the clay and for it to do what you want it to do,” Jerome laughed.

“I’ve got another potter’s wheel over in the corner. Do you want to learn how to make pottery?” Jerome asked Robby.

“Do you think I can do this?” Robby asked.

“You’ll never know unless you give it a try, right?” Jerome smiled.

Jerome took some clay out of his box and set it onto the potter’s wheel he had taken from the corner. He put a bowl of water next to the wheel and prepared the table for Robby to try his hand at making his first piece of pottery.

Robby was not sure about what he was doing, but it was better than running away from the boys outside.

Jerome showed him how to prepare the clay. He cut the clay many times to get the air bubbles out of it. He taught him how to spin the wheel and form the clay into something of which he could be very proud.

“Why do you cut the clay so many times?” Robby asked.

“If we don’t get the air out, then it will explode when we put it into the oven.” Jerome answered.

Robby’s first bowl was ugly, but Jerome didn’t care.

“OK Robby the next step is to let the clay sit for a day. Then tomorrow we’ll put it into the kiln to fire it and make it hard. Do you want to come back tomorrow?” Jerome asked.

Realizing that it was getting late, Robby asked, “What time is it?”

“About 5:30,” Jerome answered after looking at his watch.

“I’ve got to go home for dinner. What time do you want me to come back tomorrow?” Robby asked.

“Any time, I’ll be here all day,” Jerome answered.

The next day Robby arrived at the workshop after he had eaten his breakfast and had finished his chores at home.

“I’m ready, what do we do now?” Robby said excitedly, as he walked in the door.

Jerome was sitting at his potter’s wheel forming another piece of pottery as he looked over his glasses at Robby and smiled.

“Good morning to you, Robby. Are you ready to learn?” Jerome asked.

“Yep! What do we do first?” Robby inquired.

“Get your bowl, and bring it here,” Jerome instructed Robby.

Robby went to the shelf where his ugly bowl was sitting and brought it to the table.

“See the bottle and the brush over on the desk? Bring them to the table so I can show you what is next,” Jerome said, as he pointed with his eyes to where the paint and brush were located.

Robby picked up the bottle and brush and brought them to the table. Jerome stopped spinning his own clay to show Robby how to put the glaze onto the bowl, inside and out.

“We’ll let the glaze dry for about an hour, and then we’ll put it into the oven to harden it and for the color to change,” Jerome explained.

While Robby waited for the glaze to dry, he took another clump of clay and prepared it for the potter's wheel. He turned the clay over and over, just as Jerome had shown him to do. He cut the clay and folded it to remove the air bubbles. Jerome said that if there was air in the clay it would explode in the oven.

Jerome sat quietly working on his own, but every once in a while, he would look over the top of his glasses to see how the boy was doing. They sat in silence creating works of art.

After an hour, Robby took the bowl he had made earlier and put it onto a wooden paddle. Jerome showed him how to place the bowl inside of the oven. Robby stared at the bowl as it turned bright red from the heat.

When the bowl was finished, Jerome set it onto a shelf to cool. The color changed slowly from red to dark blue.

"Wow, that's so cool! How did it turn blue?" Robby asked.

"Remember the glaze?" Jerome asked.

"Oh, yeah, what other colors are there?" Robby asked.

"I can mix any color you want," Jerome answered.

At the end of the day, Robby was excited to take his bowl to his mother so she could see what he had made.

The next day when Robby came back, he was not in a good mood.

"What happened?" Jerome asked.

"Nothing," Robby responded.

"Why are you so sad?" Jerome persisted.

"Do you remember those boys who chased me?" Robby asked.

"Yeah," Jerome answered.

"They found me as I was going home yesterday, and they broke my bowl. I didn't get to show it to my mom," Robby explained.

"Well, we'll just make a better one then!" Jerome said as he tried to encourage Robby.

Jerome left he was working on to work with Robby. He showed him how to make the clay do exactly what Robby wanted it to do. This time the bowl was perfectly shaped. They put the wet clay on the shelf to dry.

The next day Robby came running through the door.

“Is it ready yet?” Robby asked.

“It sure is. Now I’m going to teach you how to paint the bowl,” Jerome said as he put out several bottles of glaze onto the table.

Jerome taught Robby how to use different colors to make his bowl beautiful. They spun the bowl and put layers of color one on top of the other.

Soon it was ready for the fire. Robby gently lifted the bowl into the oven and then watched as it turned bright red from the heat. He was excited!

When enough time had passed, Jerome told Robby, “It’s time to take it out of the kiln.”

As the bowl cooled and the colors began to show, Jerome smiled.

“Now that’s a fine piece of pottery!” he said

When it was time for Robby to go home, Jerome put on his hat.

“Where are you going?” Robby asked.

“I’m going to walk you to your house. I’d like to meet your parents,” Jerome informed Robby.

As they were walking toward Robby’s house, the three boys came out of the grocery store holding bottles of soda.

“There’s the Ginger Boy!” they exclaimed. “Get him!”

Robby got scared as the boys came closer.

“Don’t worry Robby, they won’t hurt you,” Jerome smiled, trying to make Robby feel better.

As the boys approached Robby and Jerome, they taunted them.

“So, you got another bowl, do you? We’re going to break that bowl just like we did the other one,” they said laughing.

“Hey old man, what’re you doing with this Ginger Boy? Do you like Ginger Boys?” they said over and over.

Jerome just kept walking with Robby following behind, ignoring the boys.

Just then, one of the boys ran toward Robby trying to break the bowl, but before he got to Robby, Jerome tripped the boy. He fell into the dirt, missing Robby.

This made the other boys angry.

They said, “So this is how you want it old man. We can take you and the Ginger Boy.”

As the boys tried to attack, Jerome sent them flying to the right and to the left. The boys got up and tried again, but before they knew it, they were on the ground again.

Before the boys could continue to fight with Jerome and Robby, several of the townspeople came out and told the boys to go home.

Robby and Jerome walked off toward Robby’s house.

When they arrived at his home, Robby told his parents what Jerome had done to the three boys. He even forgot to show them his bowl.

When he finally showed the bowl to his parents, they were amazed.

“If it’s OK with you, I would like to teach Robby how to make pottery. He is very good,” Jerome asked Robby’s parents.

“If it’s OK with Robby, it’s OK with us,” they responded.

“That’s great!” Robby said excitedly. “And will you teach me how to do what you did to those boys as well?”

VOCABULARY: (*Match the word to its definition*)

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. skill _____ | a. pays no attention to |
| 2. mold (v) _____ | b. break, wreck, destroy |
| 3. beat up _____ | c. shape |
| 4. mix _____ | d. ability to do something |
| 5. stool _____ | e. very hot oven |
| 6. ruin _____ | f. earthenware, ceramic |
| 7. clump _____ | g. blend together, stir |
| 8. ignore _____ | h. fight, hurt |
| 9. pottery _____ | i. tall seat, chair |
| 10. kiln _____ | j. pile, bunch |

TRUE OR FALSE:

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1. Robby hid in Jerome's shop. | T / F |
| 2. Robby liked to make pottery. | T / F |
| 3. The boy's called Robby "Gingerbread". | T / F |
| 4. The pottery shop was in the city. | T / F |
| 5. Robby's parents were mad at him. | T / F |
| 6. The pottery turned yellow in the kiln. | T / F |
| 7. Jerome was an old man. | T / F |
| 8. The boys broke the second bowl Robby made. | T / F |
| 9. Jerome made the boys fall into the dirt. | T / F |
| 10. Jerome was a master potter. | T / F |

MULTIPLE CHOICE:

1. What color was Robby's first bowl? _____
 - a) blue
 - b) green
 - c) orange
 - d) red

2. What was the name the boys called Robby? _____
 - a) Gingerbread
 - b) Carrot Top
 - c) Ginger Boy
 - d) Red

3. What did the boys have when they left the grocery store? _____
 - a) popcorn
 - b) candy
 - c) coffee
 - d) soda

4. What color did the pottery turn when it was in the kiln? _____
 - a) red
 - b) green
 - c) orange
 - d) blue

COMPREHENSION: (*Write a complete sentence to answer the question.*)

1. Why did Robby run into the shop?

2. What happened to Robby's first bowl?

3. How many boys chased Robby?

4. Why did the boys tease Robby?

5. What did Jerome make in his shop?

6. To whom did Jerome talk to about Robby learning to be a potter?

7. Who finally stopped the boys from fighting with Jerome and Robby?

8. How long did the clay need to dry before being painted?

9. How did the potter's wheel spin?

10. What was the paint called that was used on the pottery?
