

The three dolls

Once upon a time there was a teacher - a good teacher, a fine teacher. When he walked down the street children would say, "That's the teacher. He knows lots of stuff." In class he would talk, talk, talk, and the children would listen, listen, listen. One day he said to his class, "Tomorrow is riddle day. Bring me your riddles and ask me, and if I can't guess one, you can choose what we do in class for the rest of the term." And so the children went home and they collected their riddles and they brought them back to class the next day.

"Teacher, teacher, what is it that has two hands and a face but no feet?"

"Why a clock, of course."

"What runs all day yet stays in one place?"

"A river."

"What has a head, a foot and four legs?"

"A bed."

The teacher was good and knew them all until the storyteller's daughter stood up with three identical dolls and asked, "What is the difference between these three dolls?" The teacher couldn't tell the difference and sent the children out to play, saying that he would have the answer upon their return. First he asked the smartest student in the school to see if they could see any difference between the three dolls. She measured them, smelt them, examined them very closely and said, "They're all the same."

Then the teacher asked the most foolish student in the school the same question and he said, "Of course they are different, look, this one is an aeroplane," and the foolish child took one of the dolls and started to zoom it around the classroom.

The children came in from play and the teacher said to the storyteller's daughter, "There is no difference that I can see. So if you can show me a difference, you win."

"The difference is on the inside," she told him. She took the first doll then reached out and plucked a long, white hair from her teacher's beard. Taking the hair she pushed it through the first doll's ears and the hair disappeared. "This doll is wise," she told him. "Whatever it hears it keeps to itself." She took the second doll and another hair from the teacher's beard and threaded it through the doll's ear only this time the hair came straight out the other ear. "And this doll is a fool," she told him. "Because what goes in one ear comes straight out of the other."

Finally, she took the third doll and another hair from the teacher's beard. This time when it was pushed into the ear it came out the mouth, all twisted and curly. "And this doll is a storyteller," she said. "For what it hears will eventually come out."

"But now there's another riddle," said the teacher, "Because when the hair went into the ear it was straight - look at it now!"

"Ah," sighed the storyteller's daughter. "No storyteller worth his or her salt ever tells a story exactly the way they heard it."