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# The Rainbow: Exploring Images of Moral Imagination for Our Time

— Janene Ping

Last spring, after a good rain, I was walking with the kindergarten children along the Agawamuck Creek in Hawthorne Valley. We were excited to see the rushing waters and some of the children were straying from the path. Because we were walking through a part of the forest where endangered spring wildflowers grow, I paused with the group and said to them all that we must stay on the path in that part of the forest to help Mother Earth keep the little plant children safe from harm.

My partner, a boy soon to enter first grade, turned to me and said, “How can WE help Mother Earth when the president does not even believe in global warming?” This was the question posed by a child of six. Increasingly in this last year politics have entered the conversations of the children . . . After a pause I answered, “We can help Mother Earth by staying on the path when we know the right way to go.” This answer rang true for me on many levels, but I have thought much about this moment shared in the forest last spring.

Though we may strive to protect our children from the heart-rending issues of the world, these young ones will inherit the future that is being created more so than we. Many of them hear about the challenges facing humanity; some have attended political marches, and others are already trying to make sense of the inequities experienced on economic levels. From conversations shared with colleagues in summer conferences this year, I know mine is not an isolated experience of this reality. Our work strongly embraces the time spirit of our age. In ways that are developmentally appropriate, we must bring to consciousness how we are helping the children understand the world and develop resiliency to meet the future.

Steiner is often quoted as indicating that within the art of the puppet there lies the cure for that which ails modern civilization. This rings true as we seek to explore the moral imagination that lives within the images and meanings of story. In a good story our hearts are moved in resonance with a universal truth

that touches the spirit. We experience this when we witness the far-off gaze and deep breath of a child who has entered the inner journey that a good story will bring them on.

One such story that I have always found has touched the five- and six-year-old kindergarteners that I work with is “The Rainbow” by Dorothy Harrer. Today, with effects of climate change experienced throughout the world, the story rings more poignantly. Below is an adaptation of the story for puppetry, to be brought with simple plant-dyed silks and knotted fleece or silk fairies. Through the process of creation, may insight of what is needed help us to grow wiser.

## The Rainbow

*A Puppet Play adapted by Janene Ping  
from the story by Dorothy Harrer*

*Opening music—silks lifted from the stage*

Once upon a time, when was it? When was it not—the great king of the sky, the Sun, who lights the world, looked with love upon the Earth.

King Sun, wise and good, has many messengers and servants who help life to grow upon the Earth . . . There is Brother Wind, whose great breath can encircle the seven seas and all of the land in between. Then there are the sun fairies who carry the Sun’s light and warmth to the earth’s air and soils. The rain fairies then bring the droplets of mist from the earth’s waters up to seed the clouds—and then shower the rain back down again so that life below can be refreshed and renewed.

The sun fairies and the rain fairies love the plant children of the earth and they delight in their favor! But once upon a time they did not know how important each of the others was . . .

Once there was a wee, shining, golden sun fairy who had set about his day’s work carrying his shining spear of light and warmth down to the plant children of the Earth. He was very certain that his was the

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most important of all the work there was and thus his spear was very pointed! He was trying to work as quickly as he could so that he could make the fastest journey from Sun to Earth that ever was. He was not careful about where he was going. Thus it was that he flew right into a rain fairy who was bringing the mist from the earth's morning up to seed the clouds! The sun fairy flashed angrily and the rain fairy swelled with blue despair.

"Why didn't you look where you were going?" shouted the sun fairy. "You have made me change my course!"

"You flew into ME!" replied the rain fairy, "And you have made me drop the mist! You have interrupted the most important work there is!"

"Your work is not so important for the plant children!" replied the sun fairy. "It is the warmth and light that we sun fairies bring that they need the most!"

"NO! NO! NO!" shouted the rain fairy—who by now was beginning to swell like a big blue bubble. "WE rain fairies ARE the most important!" and she called to the other rain fairies who were beginning to wonder what all of the stormy noise was all about. "Sisters! Come and gather—listen to this! This sun fairy thinks that his work is more important than ours!"

The sun fairy then answered with a call to his brothers. "Sun fairies, bring your spears and gather! This rain fairy thinks the plant children need the rain more than our warmth and light!"

*Music as the rain and sun fairies gather*

The rain fairies gathered in a great dark cloud, rumbling and grumbling dissent, and the sun fairies came together in a force of lightning flashing with fire across the sky. They were in great disagreement and the sky was filled with stormy thunder and strife.

*Discordance*

Now it was that King Sun heard the terrible noise. He looked down upon his helpers and sighed for he knew that their fighting would not do. They needed to grow wiser.

So the Sun summoned the wind and commanded, "Go and blow the rain fairies away to the highest of the mountains; stay there until I call you to bring them back."

*Music—blowing winds scatter  
rain fairies and clouds*

A great windstorm blew all of the clouds and the rain fairies away so that the sky was clear with not a drop of mist or moisture anywhere.

The sun fairies thought that this meant King Sun knew them to be the most important. They happily and proudly flashed with joy as they brought the warmth and light down to the plant children of the Earth. The days grew warmer and warmer, day after day.

The plant children began to get hot and tired.

"We are so thirsty!" they called. "When will the rains bring us water?"

But the sun fairies pretended not to hear. They just kept bringing their fiery spears down to the earth. The streams and rivers began to dry up. The ponds became puddles. The little plant children wilted and became brown and they called for help.

Still, the sun fairies paid no attention to their cries.

Then many of the plant children curled up and died, all except the great trees who were stronger than the rest. They called up to King Sun, "When will the rain fairies come again? Our littlest ones have disappeared and the Earth has become parched so that we too will soon be no more!"

Then the sun fairies were NOT so proud of their spears of pointed fire. They saw what they had done and knew it to be wrong.

So King Sun called to the wind, "Brother Wind, bring back the rain fairies."

*Music—rain stick and wind sounds*

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Brother Wind blew north, south, east, and west, and all of the scattered clouds and rain fairies came back. They saw what had happened to the earth and its plant children and they shouted to the fleeing sun fairies, “You see, it is US who really bring life to the plant children—not you with your red and yellow fire spears!”

The rain fairies leaped from the clouds, bringing great showers of rain over the earth. The dry, parched earth became moist again. The streams and ponds began to fill. Day after day the clouds covered the sky and the rain fairies splashed down from the sky. Seeds, kept safe in the soil, sprouted and grew. Soon the grasses and plants were green and lush once more. But then the waters began to rise. There was no warmth and light, the earth became dark and too damp.

*Music*

The plant children needed the warmth and the light. “It is too much water—we are so cold!” they cried. But the rain fairies pretended not to hear.

Then the waters rose high and washed away the soils. The plant children’s roots lost their holding to the earth and they were swept away in a great flood. Only the oldest, strongest trees were still standing. They called up to King Sun, “It is too much water ... we are drowning.”

The rain fairies then knew that they had been wrong. They were saddened to see what they had done.

King Sun called to Brother Wind, “Scatter the clouds and let the rain fairies and the sun fairies meet each other once more.”

*Music*

Brother Wind scattered the clouds. The sun fairies met the rain fairies in the center of the sky. Each now knew better than to boast and fight. They greeted each other and spoke: “The plant children need the work each of us can do. They need both sunshine and rain to grow again. Together we will help.”

When King Sun heard them speak thus, he smiled. A great peace filled the air.

*Music—as fairies begin to dance*

Then the sun fairies and the rain fairies began to dance with joy for their new friendship. As the yellow and red sun fairies danced with the blue rain fairies, new colors began to shimmer in the air. A great arch of color—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple spread from earth to sky and back to earth again.

*Music—as rainbow silk appears*

Thus it is when we see a rainbow in the sky, we remember that the sun fairies and the rain fairies know how to honor each other. The peace that they have made helps all life on this great earth to grow.

*Music—ending, cover stage*

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