



The Thief in the Poufy Dress

Writing prompts, discussion questions, and audio transcript

ABOUT THE STORYTELLER

Kat Yeh is the author of the award-winning middle grade novel *THE TRUTH ABOUT TWINKIE PIE* and the picture books *YOU'RE LOVABLE TO ME*, *THE MAGIC BRUSH*, and *THE FRIEND SHIP*. <http://www.katyeh.com>.

Talk it Out

Read the following Indian proverb:

A thief is a thief, whether he steals a diamond or a cucumber.

Now discuss:

What do you think is meant by this proverb? Do you agree with it? Explain your answer using examples from Kat Yeh's story where applicable.

Kat specifically says that she knew nobody would point a finger at her in her poufy dress. Why do you think that is?

Look closely at what you are currently wearing. Do you think people treat you differently based on how you are dressed? Do you think that is right? If it is not always right, could it ever be right? Explain your answer using Kat's story for evidence to support your opinion.

Kat indicates that although she felt guilty because Mark Johnson was blamed, her guilty conscience was assuaged by the fact that Mark was always misbehaving and not always getting caught for his misdeeds. Given Mark's background, what do you think about his being blamed for the gingerbread house incident?

Write it Out

Choose one of the following prompts and write 1-2 pages, double-spaced:

- Imagine that you are Kat's teacher and write a letter home to the parents of your students. Explain what happened to the gingerbread house and encourage the parents to talk to their children about theft. Be sure to include your own feelings in regard to the damaged gingerbread house.
- Pretend that Kat's school has a school newspaper and you are reporter for it. Write an article about the gingerbread house incident. Include a headline.
- Imagine that Mark Johnson, the boy who is wrongly accused of stealing the candy, goes home and tells his mom all about the gingerbread house incident. Write up the scene in which Mark tells his mom. Be sure to describe the setting, include dialogue, and convey Mark's feelings.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE AUDIO MEMORY

Kat: I remember this really, really affected me in first grade. The teacher brought in this really fancy, fancy gingerbread house that was elaborately decorated. It was one of those really stunning ones. During recess I snuck in and I pulled one of these big candies off the roof. It was so obvious because it left this giant hole where it was. I quickly ate it and then I ran out to recess. I think I pretended I was going to the bathroom.

Then, of course, afterwards, everybody is like [gasps], dun-dun-dun. It wasn't even like I did a subtle pull a little candy off the corner, no one will see. It was right in the middle. It was so obvious. I don't know if I just didn't think it through or I was being brazen, but I remember feeling utter terror and that everyone could tell it was me.

Then one of my best friends said, "I know how we can figure it out. We'll smell everyone's breath, and then we can tell who ate the candy." I remember shutting my mouth and feeling like this is it, this is it, oh my God. But, of course, no one listened to her; and the teacher wasn't going to go and smell everyone's breath. That's my first memory of really doing something really that I shouldn't have done that was really, really bad.

Julie: That's a great story.

Kat: I remember I was wearing a dress that poufed out a little bit. I remember standing there in terror in my poufy dress. I was very innocent looking, too. ...Nobody looked at me. I think they started blaming Mark Johnson. He was this boy I grew up with. And the guilt, but at the same time, he was always doing stuff like that, so—

Julie: He should have been blamed, gotten caught for something.

Kat: Yeah. He'd earn it sooner or later.

Julie: Oh, that's perfect. Do you remember whether the teacher was upset?

Kat: Our teacher was teacher Nan. I remember. She rarely got upset. I remember that she was calm.

Julie: Even in the face of this crisis?

Kat: Yeah, she was calm but the kids were freaking out. I think she was more interested in getting the kids calm. ... In my horror and everything else, there was a part of me that knew I would never, ever be blamed because I was the rule follower. And I knew nobody would point a finger at me in my puffy dress.

Julie: Kat, that's a little diabolical.

Kat: You know, it really does, doesn't it? But I knew.

Julie: You didn't sort of act on this knowledge later, like, gosh, what a wasted lifetime of opportunities.

Kat: No. I know. If I hadn't been a rule follower I probably really could have used it.

Julie: Right. I mean, I guess eventually the veneer would've worn off somehow, but still.

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