

(Ruth Prins is well-known as "Wunda Wunda" of Northwest television and "Mrs. Alphabet" of NBC Los Angeles. She is director of preschools in the View Ridge and Magnolia areas)

SNOWWHITE IN JAIL?

"But she was hungry and she needed it." "I think she shoulda knocked." "Why didn't the dwarfs lock their door? My Mom always locks our door when we go away." "I think she should have waited until the dwarfs came home and then asked for some food."

The discussion began as the children were ~~were~~ recreating the story of "Snowwhite and the Seven Dwarfs." Ed protested that Showwhite hadn't knocked before going in the house of the dwarfs and Snowwhite had replied she didn't need to. The lively lively discussion expanded into an exploration of the concept of stealing.

Brandon stated flatly: "Stealing is taking something without paying for it."

Karl protested: "That's not stealing..that's shoplifting."

John sought to clarify: "Stealing is taking something without asking if you could have it and paying first. It belongs to somebody else and you just take it and put it in your pocket or behind your back and shopping is making a list and buying things and paying for them."

There was cacophany as each child sought to be heard. Most children saw stealing as a furtive experience done by ephemeral "robbers" or "burglars." All had tales of someone they knew who had been robbed and they were indignant about it. They certainly didn't want someone's coming in their house and taking their things. But taking a few things from a school or a store..in the daylight.

PRINS

(Snowwhite in Jail?)

ADD ONE

Was that all bad?

Colleen was inclined to justify. "Sometimes the children don't know any better...like if you're two or one."

Julie also was inclined to tolerance. "I know why kids steal sometimes...because they don't have any money." (I asked if she considered the stealing all right in this situation.) "Yes,.. because they don't have any money, you see." (There was more agreement to this reasoning than you'd care to believe!)

Then there was the fear of punishment. Stealing shouldn't be done, not because in itself it was a bad thing, but because the punishment was awesome.

"If you steal something it's bad because you go off to the city jail and you won't be able to get out."

"If you steal something some people maybe will call the police and a watch dog will come and if the watch dog sees the burglars pack things the watch dog maybe will rush back to the policeman."

The question was raised: if someone does steal and you see it what should you do? One answer: "Go call the police and the police will say 'who are you and what kind of money did you steal?'"

John could see further extensions of the stealing: "If somebody steals all the money the people have they'll be poor and they can't buy anything...they'll all die because they can't buy food or drink because they'll use all their food up and they'll die because their stomach gets upset and if it doesn't get any food it'll just go down dead and just be all done!"

How do children learn not to steal? Johnny said, "If you have a good mom or dad, they kind of teach the kid not to steal so when they go in a store they won't steal."

Children see stealing and shoplifting as being different.

PRINS
ADD TWO

(Snowwhite in Jail?)

"They're both different because shoplifting is just taking something from the store. Stealing is going to someone's house and taking some money away from the person. They're both as bad as stealing I guess but they're different too and somehow if the robbers get together they'll steal both together and they'll be friends!"

Nocturnal burglary is definitely bad but a little light purloining in the daylight on a friendly buddy basis is probably all right! Lacking is a strong sense of property. They understand MINE but do not feel as strongly about YOURS or THEIRS or HIS or HERS.

Why not?