

Chapter 22 “Pinocchio Goes to School”

Bright and early the next morning, Pinocchio started for school.

When the other children saw a puppet enter the classroom, they laughed until they cried. All the boys played tricks on him. One pulled his hat off, another tugged at his coat, and a third tried to paint a mustache under his nose. One even tried to tie strings to his hands and feet to make him dance. The teacher finally put an end to the **mayhem**¹ by ordering the children to their seats.

For a while, by sitting very still and forcing himself to wear a **deadpan**² expression, Pinocchio managed to maintain his **composure**³. But behind him he could hear the other boys whispering to each other about him and quietly laughing. Any remark that wasn't **blatantly**⁴ cruel was filled with **innuendo**¹.

¹ **mayhem** This word signifies a state of (often violent or noisy) commotion, confusion, or disorder; havoc, disruption, chaos, pandemonium, etc. (as in *the mayhem of the Marx Brothers*). According to Compton's Encyclopedia, in the early days of radio (1920s), "because there was very limited regulation, radio stations interfered with each other, creating mayhem on the air."

² **deadpan** If something (a facial expression or manner of speech, for example) is *deadpan*, it's totally without expression or emotion; it's blank, wooden, etc. Such an expression or manner is sometimes "put on" by performers for comic effect. Comedian Jack Benny (1894-1974) was known for his *deadpan* stares and for his image as the world's stingiest man and world's worst violin player.

³ **composure** A person's *composure* is his calmness of mind; his self-control; his coolness, poise, etc. First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy was admired for her elegance in fashion and for her *composure* following the 1963 assassination of her husband (President John F. Kennedy).

⁴ **blatant (blatantly)** Anything described as *blatant* is completely and unashamedly (and often offensively) obvious or conspicuous; it's glaring, barefaced, etc. (as in *blatant lie* or *blatant exaggeration*). *If you walk through various neighborhoods of New York City, you'll see blatant differences in levels of wealth.*

At first he ignored their insults; but as they continued, he found it harder and harder to remain **impassive**². Then, when they started trading **jocular**³ remarks—“Is that a nose or a flagpole?” for example—he lost his patience and, turning around, said threateningly, “Careful, boys; I haven’t come here to be **harassed**⁴ or made fun of. I’ll respect you and I want you to respect me.”

“Good for you!” **jeered**⁵ the boys, bursting with laughter.

¹ **innuendo** If you express something (usually negative) about someone or something without actually coming right out and saying it—that is, if you say it indirectly by merely hinting at it or by making a remark with a double meaning—you’re using *innuendo*. *During the 1980 presidential election campaign, Republican vice presidential candidate George H. Bush said that while he was taking “the high road” (in conducting his campaign), his Democratic opponents (Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale) were guilty of “innuendo and low-road politics.”*

² **impassive** If you’re *impassive*, you experience no emotion or you show none; you are (or act as though you are) calm, unmoved, undisturbed, unaffected, indifferent, etc. *When he drew four aces on the first deal, he kept his face impassive, though his heart was filled with glee.*

³ **jocular** People who are *jocular* speak or act in a joking manner; they’re funny, witty, playful, tongue-in-cheek, etc. Speech or action described as *jocular* is in the nature of (or contains) a joke. *In 2001 journalist Rich Lowry said that whenever President George W. Bush is first introduced to someone, his routine is “a firm handshake, a look in the eye, [and] a jocular exchange of words.”*

⁴ **harass (harassed)** To *harass* someone is to (usually persistently or repeatedly) bother him (or disturb, pester, or irritate him) with demands, threats, annoyances, or the like. *According to Compton’s Encyclopedia, before she was burned at the stake, (15th-century teenaged French military leader and heroine) Joan of Arc “had been held for many months in chains, threatened with torture, and harassed by thousands of questions.”*

⁵ **jeer (jeered)** To *jeer* is to speak or call out in a mocking, insulting, or teasing manner; to make fun of or poke fun at (someone), especially in a rude or unkind way; to tease, insult, ridicule, etc. As a noun, a *jeer* is a mocking, insulting, or teasing remark or shout; a sarcastic wisecrack. *Baseball umpire Tom Gorman once said (of his profession), “It’s a strange business: all jeers and no cheers.”*

Just then, the teacher, who'd been writing on the blackboard, spun around and said sharply, "What's going on here?"

"Sorry, sir," said the boy who'd made the flagpole remark. "Just trying to inject a moment of **levity**¹ to make our new classmate feel more comfortable. We were just kidding with him — all in fun, of course — and he **misconstrued**² our innocent jokes for insults. But we won't do it again." Then the boy lowered his head, as if in shame.

"Very well," said the teacher. "But don't let it happen again. I won't **tolerate**³ that kind of behavior. Does everyone understand that?"

"Yes, sir," all the children chanted in **unison**⁴.

¹ **levity** Technically, this word signifies lightness of mind, manner, character, behavior, etc. But people generally use this word to signify a lack of seriousness; an instance of (sometimes inappropriate) merriment; undignified behavior, etc. In 1973 writer Michael Lesy said that if you've ever had pictures taken by a professional photographer, "you seldom smiled, since levity was not the mark you wanted put across your face forever."

² **misconstrue (misconstrued)** To *misconstrue* something (a statement or one's motives, for example) is to mistake the meaning of it; misinterpret it; take it in the wrong sense. If you omit the hyphen in the following, your meaning may be misconstrued: "100-odd teachers attended the educator's conference."

³ **tolerate** To *tolerate* something (bad behavior, a bad situation, an opposing point of view, etc.) is to put up with it; to allow it, permit it, accept it, endure it, etc. In 1961 British philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell said, "[Nuclear weapons are] utterly horrible [and] no one with one spark of humanity [should] tolerate [them]." The adjective is *tolerant* (as in a nation tolerant toward all religious beliefs). The noun is *tolerance* (as in zero tolerance for guns and drugs in school). Note: Speaking medically, to *tolerate* something is to endure it with no ill effects (as in *tolerate a strong medicine* or *tolerate intense heat*).

⁴ **unison** When a group (of people, animals, etc.) does something in *unison*, they do it all at the same time, in the same way; they do it together; they act as one (as can be seen in synchronized swimming or competitive rowing, for example). According to Grolier's Encyclopedia, "In flight, a line of pelicans may move as choreographed dancers, beating their wings, gliding, and dipping in unison." Note: In music, a *unison* is the sounding of notes at the same pitch (by different voices or instruments together).

But none of this caused the boys to **desist**¹ from their shenanigans. As soon as the teacher's back was turned, the boy across from Pinocchio put out his hand and pulled the puppet's nose. This time Pinocchio **retaliated**². In one **deft**³ motion, he extended his leg under the desk and kicked the boy hard on the shin.

"Oh, what hard feet!" cried the boy, rubbing the spot where the puppet had kicked him.

"And what elbows! They're even harder than the feet!" shouted another one, who'd thrown a spitball and received a blow in the ribs in **reprisal**⁴.

With that kick and that blow Pinocchio won everybody's respect. Everyone admired him and wanted to be his friend.

As the days passed into weeks, even the teacher praised him, for he had an **acquisitive**¹ mind and a **retentive**² memory. He

¹ **desist** To *desist* is to stop or discontinue some (sometimes harmful or illegal) action or activity. *The U.S. government prohibits false or deceptive advertising, and violators are ordered to desist from running such ads.*

² **retaliate (retaliated)** To *retaliate* is to pay back an injury (or insult, wrong, etc.) with another; to get even, settle the score, get revenge, etc. *In his second inaugural address (January 1985), President Ronald Reagan said, "For decades, if either [the U.S. or the Soviet Union] resorted to the use of nuclear weapons, the other could retaliate and destroy the one who had started it."*

³ **deft** If you're *deft* in action, you're quick, skillful, neat, light, etc. *Former basketball great "Magic" Johnson was known for his height, speed, and deft ball handling.* If you're *deft* in thought or expression, you're quick, clever, practiced, accomplished, etc. *Comedian and actor Billy Crystal has earned praise for his deft hosting of the Academy Awards.*

⁴ **reprisal** A *reprisal* is an act or instance of retaliation (a getting even or getting back for an injury or wrong). Note: Military *reprisal* is the inflicting of equal or greater injuries (than those received) on an enemy. *In April 1986 President Ronald Reagan ordered an air attack on the headquarters of Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi in reprisal for a terrorist bombing of a Berlin nightclub in which American lives were lost.*

was always the first to arrive in the morning and the last to leave when school was over.

If Pinocchio had any fault, it was that, because he was now near the top of the school's social **hierarchy**³, he had too many friends. Among these were the members of a **notorious**⁴ **clique**⁵ of **rowdy**¹ troublemakers who cared not a bit for study

¹ **acquisitive** Anything (one's mind, a nation, a corporation, a person, etc.) described as *acquisitive* has a strong desire to acquire (gain, possess) things. An *acquisitive* mind wants to acquire ideas, information, knowledge, etc. An *acquisitive* nation wants to acquire other territories by force. An *acquisitive* corporation wants to acquire other companies by buying them out. An *acquisitive* person is either one with an acquisitive mind or one who strongly wants to acquire wealth, land, possessions, etc. In 1982 journalist and humorist Andy Rooney said, "[Republicans] think that if we [the American people] admit that we have selfish, acquisitive natures and then set out to get all we can for ourselves by working hard for it, that things will be better for everyone."

² **retentive** This is the adjective form of the word *retain*. If your mind is *retentive*, you have the power or ability to retain information (facts, knowledge, etc.) with ease; you have a good memory. Spanish-born American philosopher George Santayana (1863–1952) once said, "Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness; those who cannot remember the past are [doomed] to repeat it."

³ **hierarchy** A *hierarchy* is any system of people or things (as in an organization, social group, scientific classification, set of values, etc.) ranked one above the other. For example, in the *hierarchy* of the U. S. army, a corporal is above a private but below a sergeant, and in the *hierarchy* of biological classification, a genus is above a species but below a family. Champion bridge player Ely Culbertson (1893–1955) once said, "A deck of cards [is] built like the purest of hierarchies, with every card a master to those below it, a [servant] to those above it."

⁴ **notorious** People or things described as *notorious* are famous for something bad; they're widely but unfavorably known (as in the *notorious* gangster Al Capone). Established as a prison in the 1850s, Devil's Island (a Caribbean island off the northern coast of South America) became notorious for its severe tropical climate and for the cruel treatment of prisoners.

⁵ **clique** A *clique* (pronounced *click*) is a small group of people (often within a larger group) who are friends (or who share an interest, activity, or attitude) and who tend to exclude others (from their group). *The high school lunchroom, table by table, was divided into various cliques: a clique of athletes, a clique of nerds, a clique of drama club members, and so on.*

or for success. In Pinocchio's mind their naughty behavior was **deplorable**², but at the same time it added to their **allure**³. The teacher, noticing that Pinocchio tended to **gravitate**⁴ toward these boys, one day warned him, "Be careful, Pinocchio! Good boys who associate with **ruffians**⁵ will sooner or later lose their love for study. Some day they'll be led astray."

¹ **rowdy** A person or group described as *rowdy* is rough, disorderly, and noisy. In the 1978 film *Animal House*, a college's rowdiest fraternity, *Delta House*, engages in partying, rock 'n' roll, and food fights.

² **deplore (deplorable)** In one sense, to *deplore* something is to feel or express strong disapproval of it. Many parents deplore violence on television because of the harmful influence it may have on children. In another sense, to *deplore* something is to feel or express sorrow, regret, or grief over it. In 1958, speaking of Arkansas's refusal to enforce the Supreme Court's 1954 school desegregation ruling, President Dwight D. Eisenhower said, "I deplore the need or the use of troops anywhere to get American citizens to obey the orders of [the] courts."

³ **allure** If a person or thing has *allure* it has a quality that draws one's interest, attention, admiration, or enthusiasm; it has the power to attract, entice, charm, or fascinate. For example, women sometimes wear jewelry, perfume, or makeup to add to their *allure*. In 1981 French artist Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) moved to (the South Pacific island of) Tahiti and expressed its romantic allure through his paintings.

⁴ **gravitate** As you learned in science class, the force of gravity causes physical objects to be attracted to (move toward) each other. But if you say that a person *gravitates* toward something (another person, a particular location, a field of interest, etc.), you mean that he has a natural tendency to move toward it (as if attracted by gravity). In 1977 U.S. architect Christopher Alexander said, "When they have a choice, people will always gravitate to those rooms [that] have light on two sides, and leave the rooms [that] are lit only from one side unused and empty."

⁵ **ruffian (ruffians)** A ruffian is a rough, tough, disorderly (sometimes lawless) person; a roughneck, hooligan, thug, bully, etc. In his February 1776 pamphlet "Common Sense," American patriot and political philosopher Thomas Paine said that if one were to trace the line of "kings in the world" to its origins, he would probably "find the first of them nothing better than the principle ruffian of some restless gang, whose savage manners obtained him the title of chief of [thieves]."

“That’s just a **generality**¹,” answered the puppet, shaking his head. “There’s no danger of that happening to me because I’m too wise and my moral **caliber**² is too high. I’d never allow their bad values to **impinge**³ upon my good ones.”

But it happened that one day, as he was walking to school, one of these boys ran up to him and said, “Have you heard the news?”

“No!”

“A shark as big as a mountain has been seen near the shore.”

The **simile**⁴ struck a chord deep within the puppet and he felt his wooden heart skip a beat. He gazed thoughtfully at the

¹ **generality** A *generality* is a statement or principle that applies to a whole class of instances, rather than to a particular instance. The implication is that such a statement or principle is not always true. For example, the well-known phrase “blondes have more fun” is a generality. *While campaigning against Richard Nixon in the 1960 presidential election, John F. Kennedy complained that his opponent’s speeches contained nothing but “generalities from Poor Richard’s Almanac.”*

² **caliber** The *caliber* of someone or something is its degree of worth, excellence, merit, etc.; its quality. *Leadership expert Dennis A. Peir once said, “One measure of leadership is the caliber of people who choose to follow you.”* Note: When speaking of a firearm, the word refers to the diameter of the barrel (usually expressed in hundredths of an inch), as in a .22-caliber rifle.

³ **impinge** When one thing *impinges* on (or upon) another, it has a (usually unwanted) effect on it; it intrudes, infringes, or trespasses on it. *According to the Cambridge Biographical Encyclopedia, Boris Pasternak’s novel Dr. Zhivago (1957) “describes with intense feeling the Russian Revolution as it impinged upon one individual [a Russian doctor and poet].”* Note: If you’re speaking of physical objects, to *impinge* is to strike, collide, hit against, etc., as in *a bone impinging on a nerve.*

⁴ **simile** A *simile* (pronounced *SIM-uh-lee*) is a figure of speech or literary device that compares unlike things by using the word “like” or “as” (for example, “slept like a log” or “dead as a doornail”). Note: Such a comparison that does not use the word “like” or “as” is known as a *metaphor* (for example, “heart of stone”). *One of English poet William Wordsworth’s (1770–1850) most famous similes is the opening line of his poem “Daffodils”: “I wandered lonely as a cloud.”*

boy, then mumbled **meditatively**¹, “Hmm...I wonder if it could be the same shark I heard about when my father was drowned.”

“I’m going to see it. Are you coming?”

“I can’t. I have to go to school.”

“So go to school tomorrow. What difference does one lesson more or less make?” the boy **rationalized**².

“But I thought that attending class every day was **obligatory**³. What will our teacher say?”

“Let him say whatever he wants. He’s paid to complain all day.”

“And my mother?”

“Mothers don’t know everything.”

“Do you know what I’ll do?” said Pinocchio. “For certain reasons of my own, I, too, want to see that shark. But I’ll go after school. I can see him then as well as now.”

“You fool!” cried the boy. “Do you think that a fish of that **magnitude**¹ will stand there waiting for you?”

¹ **meditate (meditatively)** To *meditate* is to consider (think about) something carefully or at length; to ponder, reflect, study, etc. The noun is *meditation* (“the act of meditating”) and the adjective is *meditative* (“characterized by or inclined toward meditation”). *Zen Buddhists (members of a religious sect popular in China and Japan) believe that enlightenment (spiritual or intellectual insight) can be attained through meditation rather than through faith or devotion.*

² **rationalize (rationalized)** To *rationalize* is to justify one’s (often undesirable) actions or opinions by offering reasonable-sounding but incorrect explanations for them. *Some men who never find the “right girl” to marry rationalize their failure by calling themselves “confirmed bachelors.”*

³ **obligatory** This word is the adjective form of the word *obligation* (“a course of action demanded of a person”). If something is *obligatory*, it’s required (as a matter of obligation) by law, society, or one’s conscience; it’s mandatory, compulsory, etc. *The Pledge of Allegiance was once an obligatory public school ritual (but state laws no longer require students to recite it).*

The puppet was in a **quandary**². On the one hand, he knew he should go to school. On the other, he couldn't pass up an opportunity to find his father.

"How long does it take to get from here to the shore?" he asked.

"An hour there and back."

"All right, then. Let's see who gets there first!" cried Pinocchio.

¹ **magnitude** Depending on the context, this word means either "greatness in size, rank, or significance," as in *the magnitude of the Great Depression*, or simply "size, extent, dimensions (whether great or not)," as in *angles of similar magnitude*. In his second inaugural address (March 1865), President Abraham Lincoln said, "Neither party expected, for the [Civil War], the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained."

² **quandary** A *quandary* is a state of uncertainty or puzzlement, especially about what course of action to take; a difficult or worrisome situation or problem. President Theodore Roosevelt once remarked: "Having captured our men, we were in a quandary how to keep them."