

Whimsy the Practice of Creativity

Genius doesn't work on an assembly line basis. You can't simply say, "Today I will be brilliant."

-Capt. James T. Kirk, "The Ultimate Computer", star date 4731.3

What is whimsy? There are whimsical fonts (*Comic Sans*), whimsical words ("ballyhoo" or "caddywhompus"), whimsical names, weddings, hairstyles and hats. Whimsy has a sense of play to it, but then we also have the expression, "on a whim", which does not (necessarily) imply playfulness so much as unplanned. Questions number six, "How intentional is your creativity?", was inspired by our opening quote by Captain Kirk. Is creativity something that can simply be turned on or off, or is whimsy a necessary foundation for creativity?

Creativity is a big, and possibly heavy, subject itself. Looking at it through the sometimes lighthearted lens of whimsy might offer some insight and approaches to being creative.

Whimsy means "caprice, fancy, sudden turn or inclination of the mind" and comes from "whimwham", thought to come from the Scandinavian meaning "to let the eyes wander".

When we go from letting the eyes wander, to letting the mind wander, or rather, letting the mind roam free, the result can be creativity. We tried to pick some examples, so first off are three poems. It seems whimsical works often offer up a twist on the everyday. Or they create some lovely nonsense. Or even begin with what appears to be one, and then becomes the other.

The Porcupine

Any hound a porcupine nudges
Can't be blamed for harboring grudges
I know one hound that laughed all
winter
At a porcupine that sat on a splinter
-Ogden Nash

The Shag

The common cormorant or shag
Lays eggs inside a paper bag;
The reason you will see no doubt -
It is to keep the lightning out.

But what these unobservant birds
Have never noticed, is that herds
Of wandering bears may come with
buns
And steal the bags to hold the crumbs.
-anonymous

I Eat My Peas

I eat my peas with honey
I've done it all my life
It makes the peas taste funny
But it keeps them on my knife
-Ogden Nash

Questions for Discussion and Discernment on your own, or with each other:

1. Does the idea of acting on a whim make you think of acting from inspiration or impulse?
2. What does creativity mean to you? Are you creative?
3. How do you foster your creativity?
4. Who influences your creativity?
5. What are some things you do on a whim? How do they turn out?
6. How intentional is your creativity?
7. Do you always tell the truth?
8. How much of a sense of humor is needed to be whimsical?
9. How are creativity and whimsy linked?

Quotes and short readings:

You can't make a completely serious painting with a banana in it

-John Currin

Just because it's funny doesn't mean it isn't serious.

-Jón Gunnar Kristinsson Mayor of Reykjavík

I realized there's something very authentic about humor because anyone can pretend to be serious, but you can't pretend to be funny.

-Billy Collins

Yeah everything's intentional it's really just filling in the dots. I mean obviously there's some creativity that goes into how you fill in the dots but basically the whole thing was drawn out as a sketch first.

-David Byrne

Passion is one great force that unleashes creativity, because if you're passionate about something, then you're more willing to take risks.

-Yo-Yo Ma

Creativity involves breaking out of established patterns in order to look at things in a different way.

-Edward de Bono

I spent a lot of years trying to outrun or outsmart vulnerability by making things certain and definite, black and white, good and bad. My inability to lean into the discomfort of vulnerability limited the fullness of those important experiences that are wrought with uncertainty: Love, belonging, trust, joy, and creativity to name a few.

-Brene Brown

Every girl needs a bit of whimsy to remind her that life is a game and it's all about having fun.

-Candace Havens

Songs are built by whimsy, faulty memory, and free association.

-Sting

His stride was long, tall, and proud. He wore a mask of proprietary disinterest, as though everything before his eyes belonged to him and his whimsy. He looked arrogant.

He fit right in.

-S.G. Night