

Indulging Dreams

Every school child, every adolescent, has heard some teacher tell somebody, or maybe the whole class, to Stop That Daydreaming! So you swing back to the realities of school work. Eyes scanning the pages of the assigned text, or fingers feeding numbers into a calculator, or ears alert to the voice that's explaining what you're supposed to be learning. But pretty soon you feel yourself slipping away again. Into the marvelous possibilities of wishful thinking. Like winning and holding the affections of the person you'd like to be with at that very moment. Testing your strength or proving yourself on the playing field. Walking, alone or with a friend, through a wooded ravine. Checking out the latest fashions at the newest shopping mall. Holed up in your room at home, enjoying the lonely pleasure of your own company. All worthy pastimes, no doubt. But they become unworthy distractions if you let idle wishing interrupt, or take over, when there's a mental task to complete. And if that kind of daydreaming becomes a habit, the growth of your mind will be stunted, never reaching the level of development you're capable of attaining.

But there are other times—appropriate times—for daydreaming. Times for letting your imagination take off. Times for leaving classrooms and all other mundane places behind to enter worlds of fantasy. Romantic ideal worlds. Utopias of unspoiled natural beauty. Where people live in peace. Where there is no injustice. Heroic worlds full of dangers to be overcome. Where human frailty is replaced by superhuman power. Where you surmount every obstacle and defeat every foe. Frightening worlds full of overpowering dangers from which there is no escape. Absurd worlds from which human logic and reasoning are banished. Like the unconscious world of real dreams—if all that fills our heads while we're sleeping can be called real. Borrowing a word a French artist created to describe his work, we say dreams are surreal. Because they're beyond the real, existing only in somebody's mind, somebody's imagination, until the dreamer gives them life—in words, spoken or written, or in an objet d'art. Whether dreaming or fantasizing, we're moving through dream-like spaces, encountering the luminous or darkening shapes of strange objects, feeling the presence of ambiguous, enigmatic creatures.

"Please, let me finish my dream." That's what my children used to say when I was trying to get them out of bed for breakfast and another school day. You can finish your dreams now. On paper. Your night-time dreams and your daytime dreams. Let your imagination play with all the possibilities. Though your experience of the real world may be limited, inside your own head you can create whatever you please. And you can put your dreams and fantasies into stories. For others to read and to enjoy.