

Painting Stories

Brush Tail Story

- Barbara Berry and Beth Sutton

(This story is intended to help the children bring their attention and their care to the cleaning of the brush. It can work well to make a little painted book, with very simple swatches of color to represent the flights followed by a white page the has just a slight hint of the tail, Then read this to the children for one of the book reading days. It is best to do it a day or two before the painting day and leave it to their digestive process. During Painting, when you feel they could use some guidance to reinforce the cleaning process, just quietly say the swishing verse, without explanation, and model the brush rinsing as you do it. At the end of the swishing, dab the brush on the rag to remove excess water. If the children do forget later on, just repeat the verse or refer simply to the bird's tail.)

Deep in the meadow, at the edge of the forest, there lived a white bird. Each morning Sun slipped through her leaf-nest blanket and gently warmed her long neck. She lifted her head and stretched out from her bed. Her plumage was soft and pure white. Great, wide wings shone like white snow in the morning sun. Yet, most exquisite, were her long tail feathers. Long as her wing span, they trailed behind her, gently dusting the ground where she walked. Through the air they glided as she flew. Sometimes she spread her great wings and flew to the most majestic trees of the forest. There she feasted on the fruits of the fruit trees and the berries of bushes that reached for the sun. But most often of all she went to visit the rainbow pool that was hidden deep within the forest, surrounded on all sides by tall trees.

Though the trees around the pool were rich with fruits and the bushes were laden with berries, the white bird did not eat. She flew around the trees and landed nearby, on the shore of the rainbow pool. Delicately, she dipped her tail in and slowly moved it about in the cool water. With each gentle dip it sent rainbow ripples across the water. The ripples danced round and soon her pure white tail turned a vivid color. Which rainbow color would rise in the ripples? Which color would dance in her tail?

*Dip in the water's sweet surprise,
Dip, and the ripples will arise.
Which color will gleam in my sparkling tail?
And trace my flight through the open air.*

Some days blue seemed to rise and fall most boldly in the ripples. Then she took flight though the forest and field spreading blue behind her. Every cluster of berries she touched ripened blue. Every morning glory opened its blossom and drank of the blue rainbow water. Every chicory bud laughed its way open to feel the drops of blue on its smiling face. Higher and higher and higher she flew.

Spreading her tail long wide. Wild and playful, she stroked the sky 'till the world around her was nothing but blue.

Finally, she tired of flying and she wished her tail would become pure white again. So she glided down to land beside a pool of ordinary water and began to bathe. The bird dipped her tail slowly into the water:

(rub palms together while saying the verse to make the swish sound)

*Swish, swish, swish, back and forth it did glide.
Swish, and away all the color did ride.
Swish rolled the waters off of her tail
And soon she was only a pure gleaming white.*

All the blue swished out of her tail, leaving behind just a touch of blueness in the water.

The mysterious bird then took to the skies and, sparkling in the first of the starlight, she flew home and nestled deep in her brown leaf nest. And there she slept.

When sun woke her once again, calling her back to the skies, she stretched her long white neck; she opened her great white wings, and, in a single flapping, she was once again crossing the skies.

Quickly she returned to the rainbow pool to see what magic this day would bring. Once again she delicately dipped her tail in and slowly moved it about in the cool water. With each gentle dip it sent ripples across the water. She wondered what color would greet her today and she sang out:

*Dip in the water's sweet surprise,
Colorful the ripples will arise.
Which will gleam in my sparkling tail?
And trace my flight through in the open air.*

The ripples danced round and soon her pure white tail turned a vibrant shade of red. Her heart pounded hard and, with one pump of her great wings, she was high in the sky. Behind her the reds of dawn streamed across the sky. Across forest and field she flew, straight as an arrow until below her she saw an orchard. The great white bird flew among the wide orchard trees and soon all the apples gleamed ripe and red. Then off to the bushes she quietly glided and berries were ripened wherever she went. All day long she ripened the fruits and brought a smile to the flowers of the field. Then, just as sun was sinking off to sleep, she flew across the skies. Spreading her tail wide she dazzled the sky with the pinks and reds of sunset. Then she too began to tire and again she returned to the clear water. Gently she moved her tail through the water:

*Swish, swish, swish, back and forth it did glide.
Swish, and away all the color did ride.
Swish rolled the waters off of her tail
And soon she was only a pure gleaming white.*

Now the evening stars began to twinkle and the tired, white bird flew back to nestle among the leaves at the edge of the wood. And there she slept.

One morning when the bird woke in her nest of leaves, she did not feel Sun's warm smile on her neck. She looked up to see the first light of Sun appearing on the horizon. But at the edge of the world she did not see Sun, rather she saw great, dark cloud rolling toward her. Soon there was a rumble and roar as it rolled across the skies and blew hard against her pure white up-stretched neck. The bird tried to open her wide, white wings and take to the sky, but no sooner had she spread her wings and the wind blew harsh across them pushing her back and burying her amid the brown leaves of her nest. The bird stretched up again. Now lightning cracked the sky thunder rumbled, and rain began to pour against her feathers. Still the bird pushed open her wings. Then, summoning all her strength, she pumped hard until she lifted into the sky.

The winds pushed her back, but she flapped harder to make her way right to the rainbow pool. Winds tore at her feathers and sent them flying behind. Still, she pumped on. Rain pounded and ran down her neck like tears, but still she flew on.

Finally, she below she saw the rainbow pool. Tired and worn, she circled down as quickly and quietly she could. She turned her back and put her tail into the waters, for something inside told her that today of all days she must call for the colors:

*Dip in the water's sweet surprise,
Colorful the ripples will arise.
Which will gleam in my sparkling tail?
And trace my flight through in the open air.*

No sooner had she put her tail in, than the ripples began to rise higher and faster than they ever had. They rose and fell so hard that they rocked the bird by her tail. Back and forth she rocked, holding strong to keep her tail in the water. She looked back to see what color would come with today's surprise. She saw the ripples rise and fall like the sea; fast and furious they rose and fell. And in each ripple a different color arose. Now her tail was quickly filling with all the colors of the rainbow.

The rain pounded hard and the winds blew fierce. But the white bird again summoned all her strength and opened her wings. She took to the sky. With each pumping of wing, the winds began to die down, the rain softened, and Sun began to push his way through the dark cloud. Pumping hard she found her way up above the trees, and, making a great arch she flew high and over and back down to the other side of the world. Looking behind her she saw her tail had traced a big bow of many col-

ors . Now Sun rose high and the clear sky was blue. The rain had all but stopped. With a great lift of her wings the white bird flew back along the same arch that had brought her here, and behind her, her tail traced out another bow of many colors. As the sky filled with colored arches, below her she heard the calls of delight.

Then the tired bird made her way to the age of the clear water pool.

*Swish, swish, swish, back and forth it did glide.
Swish, and away all the color did ride.
Swish rolled the waters off of her tail
And soon she was only a pure gleaming white.*

Now with her tail clear and white, just as the first of the evening stars arose the bird opened her wings and took to the sky. She flew as high she could and with one flick of her tail, she sent sparkling white up to the moon and Moon smiled back and sparkled off every feather on the great white bird. Quietly the bird flew back to nestle in her leaf-nest bed, tucking her head under her wing, she went back to sleep.