



The Wordpecker

Once there was a very fine, proud and strong woodpecker who loved to peck at trees. This woodpecker would select the biggest trees to do its pecking. Peck..peck..peck..peck..peck..peck! It pecked so fast that it sounded like hailstones on a tin roof. Woodpecker was so good at pecking that it wouldn't be long before it was tucking into juicy insects for its dinner.

The only problem Woodpecker ever had was with people. They didn't like its pecking, not one little bit. Sometimes, poor Woodpecker, being hungry, would start pecking, but before it could even get one insect out of the tree, people would start to moan. They'd shout things up at it like, "Woodpecker, stop that awful racket!"

Sometimes people would even throw things at it like old shoes or bits of wood. Poor Woodpecker would feel upset, afraid and angry. Not wanting to cause trouble, it would just move on to another place, sometimes even another country. Woodpecker got really good at languages because it had been told to 'stop', 'shut up' and 'stop and go away' in so many different tongues.

Woodpecker couldn't see why people thought its pecking was so bad. Yes, it made some noise, but it also helped the people who had crops in their gardens and fields by eating lots of insects. "They should be thanking me, not shouting at me," it thought.

Woodpecker wasn't one to give up easily so it carried on to the next place where it found a fantastic tree. It was big and tall and had been dead for a long time, so it was perfect for pecking. Just as Woodpecker was about to start pecking, it noticed there was a group of people sat around on the ground below not far away. The adults and children were sat in a circle talking and laughing. They seemed to be doing something with their hands. Woodpecker immediately felt sad. It knew that it would have to move on again, leaving this beautiful tree behind, and that it would be hungry until it found another one.

Woodpecker thought, "I'm so hungry. I'm just going have to give this tree a go and see if I can find just one insect before those people tell me to stop."

It quickly started pecking. Peck..peck..peck..peck..peck. As always, it soon found a juicy insect, ate it and then looked down at the people who, instead of shouting in complaint, simply carried on with their talking and working.

“That’s very strange,” thought Woodpecker and started pecking again, still fearful that the people below would soon be shouting at it. However, no matter how hard Woodpecker peck..peck..peck...pecked, the people below carried on as if it wasn’t there.

Woodpecker decided to rest in that tree for at least that night. It woke up the next morning and started peck..peck.. peck..peck..pecking and this time the people below looked up at it and pointed. Woodpecker got ready for the usual shouting for it to go away, but these people didn’t, they just looked up and smiled. ‘This is really, really strange’ thought woodpecker and carried on peck..peck, peck..peck, pecking. This went on for over a week with the woodpecker pecking and the people not shouting. On the tenth day of pecking at the tree, Woodpecker’s curiosity compelled it to fly down to see the people.

They stopped what they were doing and said things like, “What a fine bird you are, Woodpecker”, “What beautiful coloured feathers you have, Woodpecker”, “How strong you are, Woodpecker” and “How well you carve wood into beautiful holes, Woodpecker.”

Woodpecker said, “Thank you for your kind words and compliments, but I’m wondering why you aren’t shouting at me. People always shout at me and complain about my noise, and then they chase me away.”

“That also happens to us,” said one of the people. “You see, we are Romani and woodworkers too. We make much noise when we cut and carve the things we need for ourselves and to sell. We need to make noise to live – just like you, Woodpecker.”

“Why would we complain about you?” said another. “You are so like us, and besides, Woodpecker, when you have eaten all the insects from that tree, it will be so full of holes that it will fall down in the wind and we can use it as firewood. The very best dry firewood. No, Woodpecker, we have no problem with you. In fact, you are the first talking woodpecker we have ever met and we could listen to you speak all day long. We are so amazed by you that we have carved a wooden figure of you so we can take you with us on our travels.”

The woodpecker looked at the wooden carving and was very pleased with it, thinking it did indeed look beautiful.

Every night after that, when the woodworkers sat, ate and told their stories, the woodpecker would join in telling his stories in every language that he’d learned on his travels. He even taught the wood-workers new words. One night, one of the children, having learned many new words, looked at the woodpecker and

said, 'Because you are so good with words, you should be called "Wordpecker" instead of "Woodpecker".'

Everyone laughed and clapped their hands in agreement and from that day on the woodpecker was known by the new name of 'Wordpecker.' Both the Romani woodworkers and the 'Wordpecker' lived noisily ever after.

A story by Richard O'Neill

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. What did Woodpecker's peck sound like?
2. What did Woodpecker eat?
3. Find two things that people threw at Woodpecker.
4. How do the Romani people compliment Woodpecker?
5. Why did the child nickname it "Wordpecker"?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

S

Why was Woodpecker so good at speaking in different languages?

S

Why did Woodpecker want people to be grateful?

I

Why did Woodpecker find it strange that the people under the tree didn't say anything?

V

Find a word that tells you Woodpecker's curiosity drove him to do something.

E

How does Woodpecker's mood change over the course of the story?