

While several entrants may be telling you of the many books comprised of hundreds of pages that influenced their lives...my book was one that is small and less than twenty pages in length. I was first introduced to this story while attending elementary school. When our class had library days I would enjoy sitting and watching the different books on tape. When I was in high school, my Young Women's leader at church used this story to teach her lesson. She had bought this little book, no bigger than a post-it note, to give to each of the girls in the class. I was thrilled to see this story again after so many years and to have a copy of it for myself! The book titled "The Paper Bag Princess" by Robert Munsch, illustrated by Michael Martchenko, is the book that has given me the most inspiration in my life as well as has made an enormous impact in my life.

In short, the story is about a princess that is about to be married to a prince. Her castle gets burned by a dragon that steals her prince away. She has nothing left to wear but a paper bag. She then tracks down the dragon to rescue her prince. When she gets to the dragon's cave he doesn't want to be bothered with her. She then uses her brains and sidetracks the dragon by having him do things that just inflate his giant ego. After she has him burn down a forest with one breath and fly around the world twice, he becomes exhausted from the things she asks him to do and passes out! She is then able to save her prince, but when she finds him he complains to her about how filthy she is and to come back when she is "dressed like a real princess" (Munsch, 18). She realizes that the prince is not who she wants to marry after all, and then tells him that he looks nice but he is really a bum.

So, what was it about this short story that made me love it so much? In the end, the princess learned that what she truly wanted was not the prince at all. She was smart, clever, and didn't care what others thought about her. She was not concerned about what the dragon thought

about her in her paper bag, but instead was determined to get her prince back and was not afraid to do what she had to do.

Over the years this book has continuously taught me and reminded me of many things. When my teacher used this book to support her lesson, she used the moral of the story to teach us about our self worth. I have battled through many trials in my life since high school that has affected my self esteem. I struggled with depression through a divorce at the mere age of 20 with a 6 month old son. I became a single mother struggling to become independent from parents. I seemed to succeed in overcoming this by making a hard decision to move across the country only to continue to be dependent on more in-laws. Over those following years I became severely depressed even more for having no contact with my parents or siblings and in letting my son go and live with his dad. I had so many emotional problems I convinced myself that I had Bipolar Disorder. I knew something in my life needed to change.

I realized that something was wrong and it needed to be fixed. I knew prescription drugs were not going to get rid of my problems. I needed to change my thinking process. I was in a rut at work and made the choice to go back to school. I needed to go back to school. While attending college I have had a very hard time deciding what I wanted to be 'when I grow up'. I have many friends that have degrees in many great professions but that is not what their current career is. I ask them "why don't you use that degree after all the money you spent on it?" and they just respond saying "I just don't like it". I have spent a lot of time and effort in deciding in a career that will make me happy and will be rewarding to me in the end. I also made many more choices to turn my life around. I thought my life was bad till I found out how bad my ex-husband's was. I now have my son living with me again and I have been extremely happy in my educational decision to become a teacher.

In the end of the story the princess realized that the prince wasn't really what she wanted. Had she not gone after the prince she would never have known what she wanted. Had I not gone through all that I did, I would not have found happiness. In the end, is usually when we do learn. Some of the most important things we learn in life often come early, but as the years go on those important lessons become eclipsed by much less important things, such as material possessions, needless anxiety, pressure to live up to unreasonable expectations, and so on.

This story reminds me to aspire for greater things. Don't settle for that which everyone else wants. Remember that sometimes the grass isn't always greener on the other side. To be a princess doesn't always mean it involves tiaras, castles, and 'happily ever afters'. Being successful doesn't always mean you have to have money, power, and fame. Success should be measured by happiness, personal achievement, and respect earned. The prince was cruel to the princess in the story, but world can be cruel as well. It is in how we learn to perceive things and use them for good.