The Bear That Wasn’t

Once upon a time, in fact it was on a Tuesday, the Bear saw that it was time to go into a cave and hibernate. And that was just what he did. Not long afterward, in fact it was on a Wednesday, lots of workers arrived near that cave. While the Bear slept, they built a great, huge factory.

As winter turned to spring, the Bear awoke and stepped out of his cave. His eyes popped. Where was the forest?

Where was the grass?

Where were the trees?

Where were the flowers?

WHAT HAD HAPPENED?

“I must be dreaming,” he said. “Of course, I’m dreaming.” But it wasn’t a dream. It was real. Just then the Foreman came out of the factory. “Hey, you get back to work,” he said.

The Bear replied, “I don’t work here. I’m a Bear.”

The Foreman laughed, “That’s a fine excuse for a man to keep from doing any work.

Saying he’s a Bear.”

The Bear said, “But, I am a Bear.”

The Foreman stopped laughing. He was very mad.

“Don’t try to fool me,” he said. “You’re not a Bear. You’re a silly man who needs a shave and wears a fur coat. I’m going to take you to the General Manager.”

The General Manager also insisted the Bear was a silly man who needs a shave and wears a fur coat.

The Bear said, “No, you’re mistaken. I am a Bear.”
The General Manager was very mad, too.
The Bear said, “I’m sorry to hear you say that. You see, I am a Bear.”
The Third Vice President was even madder.
The Second Vice President was more than mad or madder. He was furious.
The First Vice President yelled in rage.
He said, “You’re not a Bear. You’re a silly man who needs a shave and wears a fur coat.
I’m going to take you to the President.”
The Bear pleaded, “This is a dreadful error, you know, because ever since I can remember, I’ve always been a Bear.”
And that is exactly what the Bear told the President.
“Thank you for telling me,” the President said. “You can’t be a Bear. Bears are only in a zoo or a circus. They’re never inside a factory and that’s where you are; inside a factory. So how can you be a Bear?”
The Bear said, “But I am a Bear.”
The President said, “Not only are you a silly man who needs a shave and wears a fur coat, but you are also very stubborn. So I’m going to prove it to you, once and for all, that you are not a Bear.”
The Bear said, “But I am a Bear.”
The President packed his vice presidents and the Bear into a car and drove to the zoo.
The Bears in the zoo said the Bear was not a Bear, because if he were a Bear, he would be inside a cage.
The Bear said, “But I am a Bear.”
So they all left the zoo and drove to the nearest circus.
“Is he a Bear?” the President asked the circus Bears.
The Bears said no. If he were a Bear he would be wearing a little hat with a striped ribbon holding onto a balloon and riding a bicycle.

The Bear said, “But I am a Bear.”

When the President and his vice presidents returned to the factory, they put the Bear to work on a big machine with a lot of other men. The Bear worked on the big machine for many, many months.

After a long, long time, the factory closed and all the workers went away. The Bear was the last one left. As he left the shut-down factory, he saw geese flying south and the leaves falling from the trees. Winter was coming, he thought. It was time to hibernate. He found a cave and was about to enter when he stopped. “I can’t go in a cave. I’m NOT a Bear. I’m a silly man who needs a shave and wears a fur coat.”

As the days grew colder and the snow fell, the Bear sat shivering with cold. “I wish I were a Bear,” he thought.

Then suddenly he got up and walked through the deep snow toward the cave. Inside it was cozy and snug. The icy wind and cold, cold snow couldn’t reach him here. He felt warm all over.

He sank down on a bed of pine boughs and soon he was happily asleep and dreaming sweet dreams, just like all bears do, when they hibernate. So even though the FOREMAN and the GENERAL MANAGER and the THIRD VICE PRESIDENT and the SECOND VICE PRESIDENT and the FIRST VICE PRESIDENT and the PRESIDENT and the ZOO BEARS and the CIRCUS BEARS had said, he was a silly man who needed a shave and wore a fur coat, I don’t think he really believed it. Do you? No indeed, he knew he wasn’t a silly man, and he wasn’t a silly Bear either.¹
Connection Questions

1. “Who am I?” is a question that each of us asks at some time in our life. In answering, we define ourselves. The word define means “to separate one thing from all of the others.” What distinguishes the Bear from all other bears? From all other workers at the Factory? Create an identity chart for the Bear. Individuals fill it in with the words they call themselves as well as the labels society gives them. What phrases does the Bear use to define himself? What words did others use to define him? Include both on the diagram.

Sources & Notes

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Lesson Link: