

DELPHI PHILOSOPHY



BEST TEACHER EVER

by David Whitney

Illustrated by Rosie Coulson

Prologue



“You’ve done what?”

Plato looked at Delphi like she had just taken off her head and thrown it out the window.

“I’ve hired a teacher,” Delphi repeated, calmly. She was sitting at a table in the front room of her house with some scrolls that she didn’t know how to read, a grass pen, which she didn’t know how to use and an overwhelming feeling of pride, which she didn’t know what to do with.

“You?” Plato asked again, still not quite believing what he was hearing.

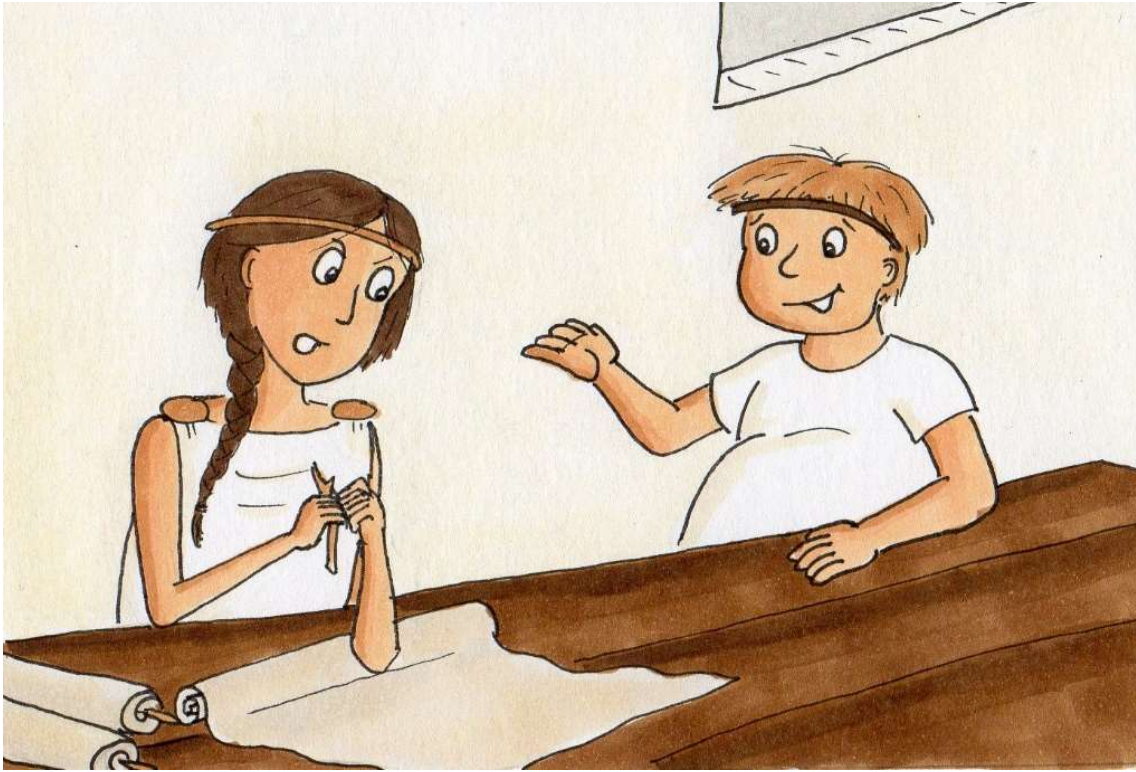
“Why are you so surprised?” Delphi asked, pouting. “It’s alright for you – you get tutors and a school and stuff to teach you things. I’m tired of feeling stupid all the time. I should be able to read at least. It can’t be that hard if you can do it. Probably only take a couple of days.”

Plato winced. “Look, it’s a good idea, but do you really think you’re the... learning type? I mean you have to listen and...”

“I do listen!” Delphi interrupted. “There’s no reason I can’t listen just as well as anyone else!”

Plato took a deep breath.

“Is this just because I got to have a teacher and you didn’t?” he asked. Delphi folded her arms and gave him one of her poisonous stares.



“No,” she lied.

“I bet it is,” said Plato. “You don’t really want a teacher! You just hate it when you’re not allowed to do something.”

“That’s not it! It’s not about you!” Delphi insisted. “I just think I should get a... What is it? When you learn stuff?”

“Education.”

“Yeah, one of them things. Then you, or any other boy for that matter, can’t think they’re smarter than me,” said Delphi, pointing at him with her piece of grass that she had fashioned into a pen. Plato shook his head.

“You’ll never listen to a teacher, I know you. I don’t think that about you anyway.”

“I will, you’ll see!” Delphi said, “Besides, my dad chose this teacher himself. He can’t do it because he’s to go and work, so he got the best one there is. He’s the best teacher ever, I bet. He’ll be way better than any of your teachers, probably. It won’t take me as long to learn stuff as it took you.”

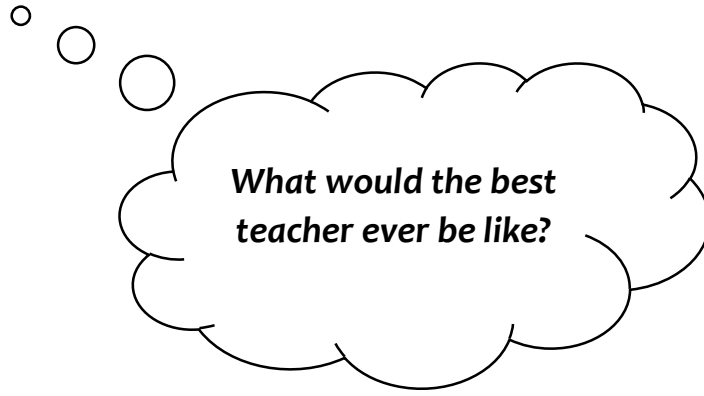
“Don’t be stupid, Delphi,” Plato laughed. “No teacher’s going to be that good, are they?”

“I’m not stupid!” she snapped. “And of course they’ll be that good. I told my dad to get the best teacher and he said he did.” She looked down at the scrolls in front of her. “Now go away, he’ll be here in a minute and I’ve got to practise.” Plato gave her a long look.

“You’ve made your pen wrong,” he pointed out, gently. Delphi threw it at him.

Plato was still giggling as he left Delphi trying to bend her reed pen back into the right shape. Teachers are never really that good, are they?

Best Teacher Ever



Part I – Meno

Say it like this!
Meen-oh



The young, smiling teacher stood at the front of Delphi’s living room.

“Excuse me, could you listen please?”

Delphi, who was fiddling with her pen, didn’t react for a second or two, before blinking a couple of times and sitting up.

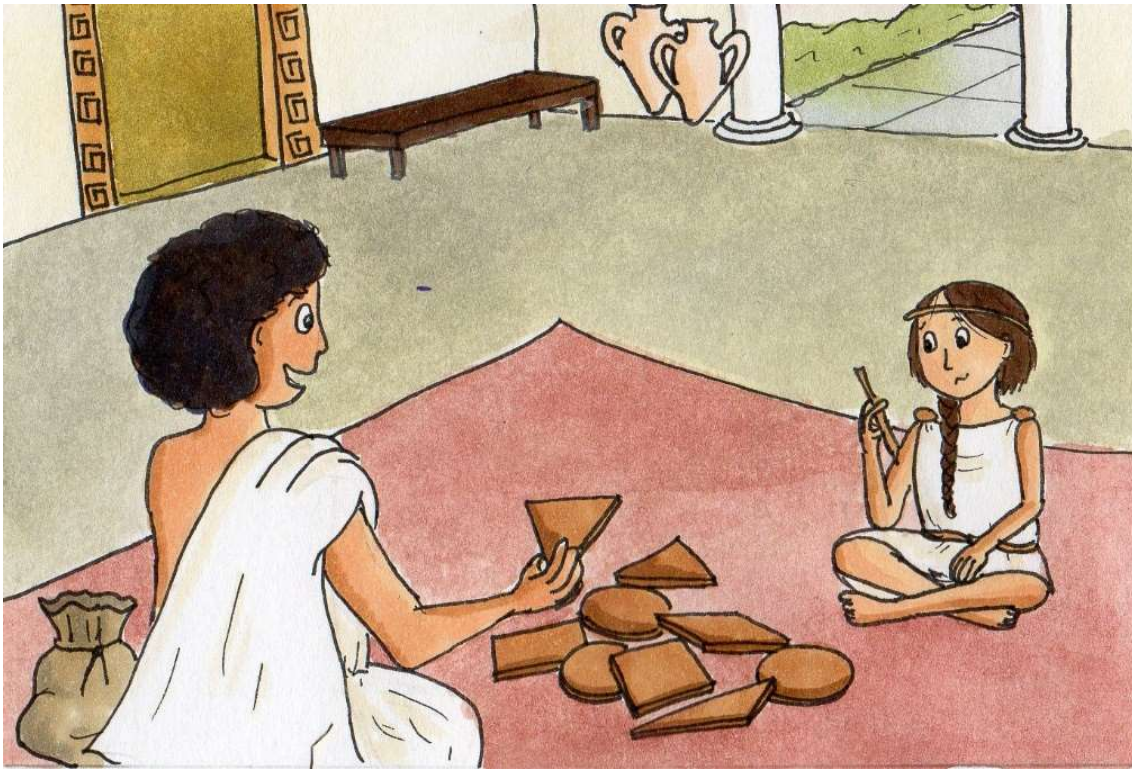
“Oh! Sorry! I was... um...”

“I was saying we are going to start with some mathematics,” he said, turning to find something amidst the scrolls and assorted teachery things that he had brought with him. Delphi, in fact, had been thinking what a good choice her father had made. He clearly was the best teacher.

Say it like this!
Soh-kra-tees

His name was Meno and he was a successful soldier and businessman, even though he was still young. He had even had conversations with the great philosopher, Socrates. He was very friendly, asked lots of questions about Delphi when he arrived and laughed often. He was smiling now, even as he pulled out a handful of wooden shapes and put them on the floor in front of Delphi. She was sitting cross-legged on the mat, staring up at him open-mouthed, without quite realising that she was doing so.

“Geometry is a good place to start, I think,” he said, kneeling down to her level. “We may not get to Pythagoras today but we’ll see how far we get!” Delphi didn’t understand any of that, so she looked at the pile of shapes in front of her.



“What’s... jomtry?” she asked. Her teacher gave her a smile.

“It’s looking at shapes,” he said. Delphi thought for a minute.

“Why does that matter?” she asked. Meno laughed. It was really quite a pleasant sound.

“Just trust me, I think I can persuade you. I can see that you are obviously a very bright girl so I think you should be able to work this out.” Delphi grinned and stuck her chest out proudly. He definitely knew what he was doing. She felt smarter already.

Her teacher passed her two triangles of the same size.

“Now, we are going to learn how to find the area of these shapes. Do you know what area means?” Delphi thought for a moment.

“Like a... place? Like in some of the big houses there’s a boy’s area and a girl’s area,” she suggested.

“Yes, that’s right. Are they different sizes?”

“Yes!” Delphi answered loudly, knowing too well which was bigger. Meno didn’t pick up on it.

“Yes, so we can measure the area of something by looking at the size of it. So we could measure the area inside this room, for example.” Delphi looked around excitedly. She was learning!

“Delphi?”

She looked back again hurriedly.

“Oh, yes. Sorry!” Meno was holding up a square.



“What’s this?” he asked.

“Some wood.”

“No, what shape?”

“Oh. Square.”

“Do you think we could use a square like this to measure this room?” Delphi wasn’t sure what he meant, but nodded, which seemed to be enough.

“Yes, we could we see how many squares would fit on the floor, couldn’t we? What would be the area of this room, do you think?” He looked at Delphi, who realised, slowly, that he was expecting an answer.

“Oh, um... quite a lot! Probably... ten hundred or something!”

Meno paused. “We’ll come back to that. Now, look at one of your triangles. How many squares do you think is the area of that shape?”

This caused the first flicker of doubt to appear in Delphi’s mind. He wanted to know how many squares a triangle was?

“It’s a triangle,” she said slowly, as though talking to a baby.

“Yes.”

“It isn’t any squares.” Oh gods, what if he was bonkers after all?

“Isn’t it?” He was smiling again.

Delphi stared at the triangles in bafflement for a few seconds. Then she looked up at her teacher again.

“I don’t know. Can’t you just tell me?”

“No, I need you to work it out. Try putting them down and moving them around. See what you remember,” he said. Delphi looked up at him, unsure. But she did as she was told and put the two triangles down and started prodding them around. Then, she had a thought and pushed them together, so their sides were touching. It made a square.



“It makes a square!” Delphi said excitedly, and then was surprised when she realised that she was excited.

“It does! So how many squares is one of those triangles if two of them make a square?”

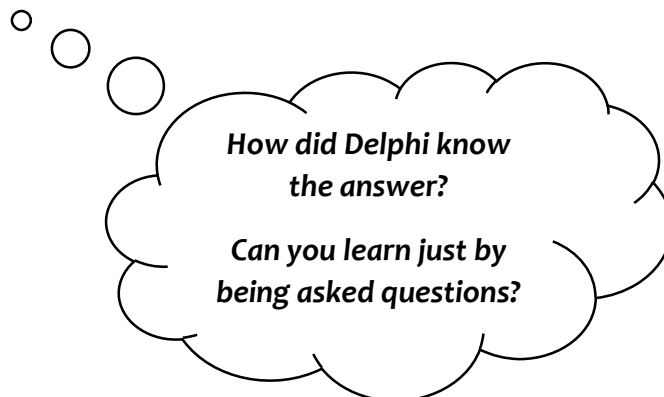
Delphi thought for a minute.

“Half?” she guessed. “Because it’s like a square cut in half?” Meno beamed at her.

“Perfect! That’s it!”

“I got it right?” Delphi asked, looking surprised. “I didn’t know I knew that! How did I know that?”

Meno laughed. “Well, that’s my job. I can help you learn by asking you questions and helping you remember.”



Delphi found herself lost in thought about this, but then realised that her teacher was talking about triangles again.

“A triangle like this has an area of half a square. We call it a...” but Delphi interrupted him.

“Why do you keep saying remembered? I don’t think I was remembering anything. I never done this before.” Meno seemed pleased with her question. He held up a finger.

“Ah, but all learning is remembering. When you learn something, you are simply remembering something that you used to know, before you were born.”

Delphi pulled a face. He was mad after all!

“What? I’m remembering something that I learnt before I was even born?” She did not sound terribly convinced by this idea and her teacher noticed.

“We’ve already proved it,” her teacher pointed out, smiling again. It was actually quite irritating. “I didn’t tell you what the area of the triangle was, did I? I just helped you remember it. How did you know that if I didn’t tell you?”



Delphi’s mouth hung open. “Um... I don’t know... I just...”

“It’s like this,” Meno said, standing up. “Let’s say I hid an object in this room and you had to find it.”

“Yeah, let’s do that!” Delphi said, leaping up. It was about time they played a game. They had been doing lessons for ages now.

“No, sit down Delphi, it’s just an example...”

“Oh.” She sat down again.

“If I hid an object in this room and you had to find it, then could you do it?”

“Yeah!” Delphi answered. “I always win at stuff like that!”

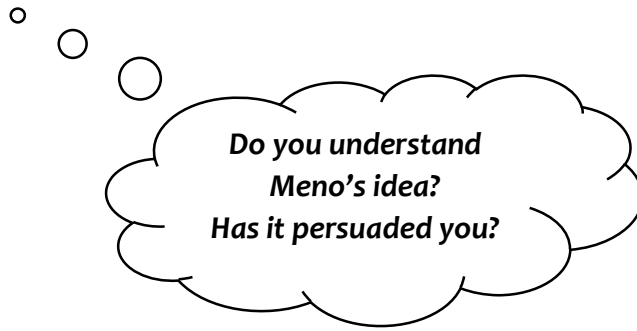
“But what would you need to know before you started looking?” Meno asked.

“I’d need to know what I was looking for, obviously.”

“Exactly!” Meno looked pleased with himself again. “So you must already know something about it before you can find it. Otherwise you’d never know what to look for, or even know when you’ve found it. Learning is exactly the same. Because you knew when you learnt something, you must have already known something about it. So, you’re just remembering it.”

Delphi thought about this. It was a bit complicated, and sounded utterly bonkers, but she could almost see what he meant.

“So have I convinced you?” her teacher asked. “Do you agree that learning is just remembering?”

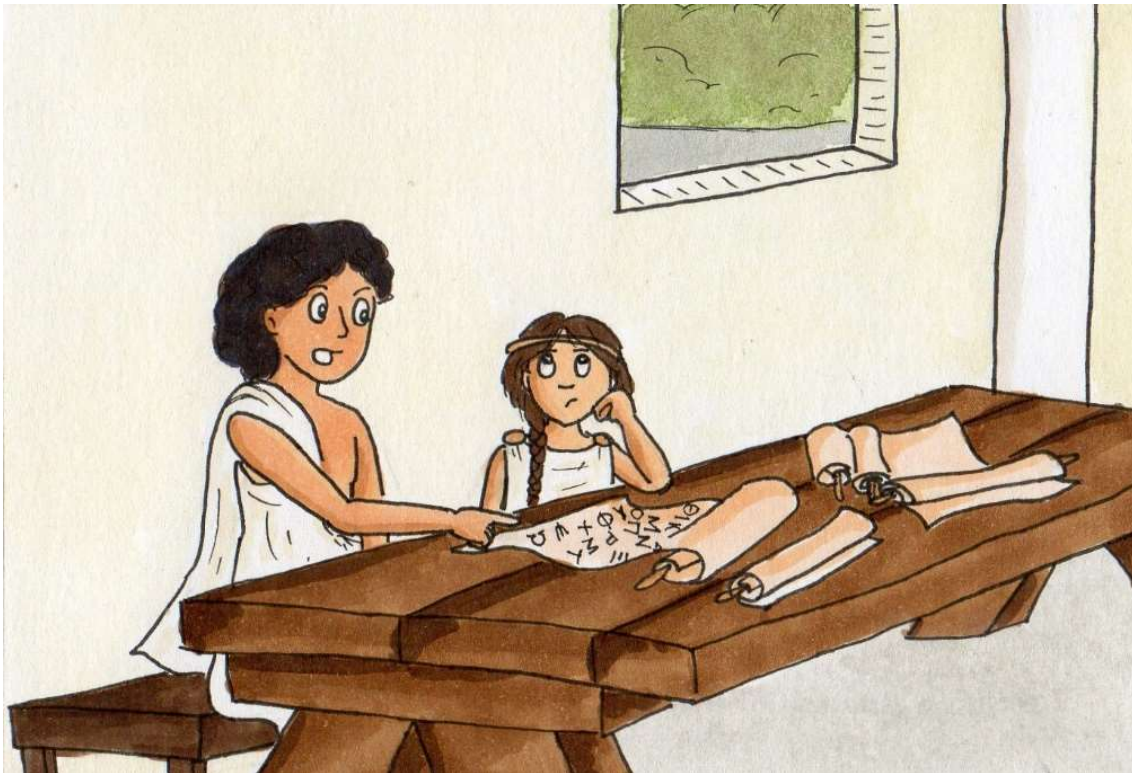


"I don't know," Delphi admitted.

"That's OK. We have plenty of time for me to show you," Meno answered, smiling at her again. Delphi was starting to feel unsure about the whole thing.

"Are we finished now?" she asked. Meno frowned.

"We only started ten minutes ago, Delphi. Now, let's look at this shape..."



To both Delphi's horror and amazement, her lessons continued for the rest of the morning. Maths was followed by beginning to learn her alphabet and then onto the history of the Greeks and their wars against the Trojans. At least she knew a few stories about that. But reading the alphabet seemed impossible.

It was perhaps not helped by the fact that by mid-afternoon it was the longest amount of time Delphi had ever spent working. It felt like weeks.

"Think hard and see if you can remember!" Meno was pointing at an entirely mysterious mark on the scroll in front of her.

"I don't know!"

"Look, does this part remind you of anything?" He was pointing at a curvy bit.

"No." Delphi folded her arms and sighed heavily.

“Come on, look properly...” There was a pause.

“Can’t you just tell me?” Delphi asked.

“It wouldn’t mean anything if I just told you! You need to remember it!” Meno was looking increasingly tense now. It had been a long day.

“But I don’t remember it!” Delphi replied, her voice louder and more impatient.

“OK, so let’s try looking at this...”

“I don’t know how to read!” Delphi yelled, pushing the scroll away. “Stop asking questions! I don’t know!”

The room went silent as the scroll fluttered onto the floor. Meno took a deep breath and stood up.



“OK, let’s stop for today. I think we’ve...”

“So that’s it, is it?” Delphi asked, looking up.

“What is?”

“Learning. You just ask me loads of questions and hope I remember it?”

“Well, that’s putting it rather simply but, in a way...” he tailed off, unsure of the look on Delphi’s face.

“Well, that’s no good is it? If I already know everything, then I’m probably going to remember it sooner or later, aren’t I? So what good’s having a teacher?”

Meno almost gasped. He looked rather silly, standing there with his mouth open. Delphi was amazed she had ever liked the look of him.

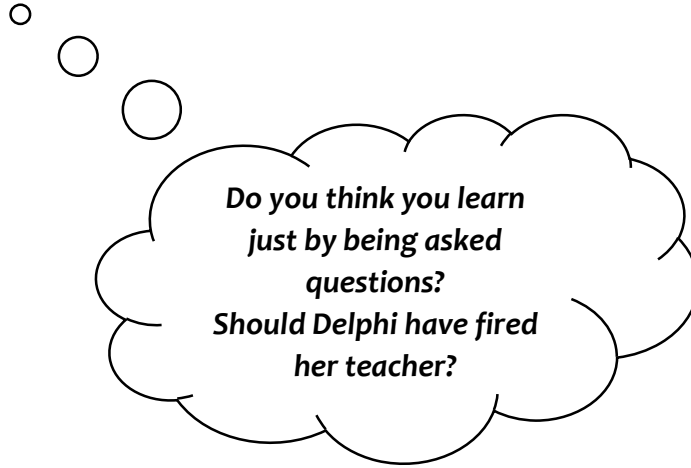
“Well, I can help you remember what...” he started, but Delphi was shaking her head.

“I think I need a teacher who is going to tell me things that I don’t know. Not just...” she waved her hand in the air. “Wait for me to remember it.”

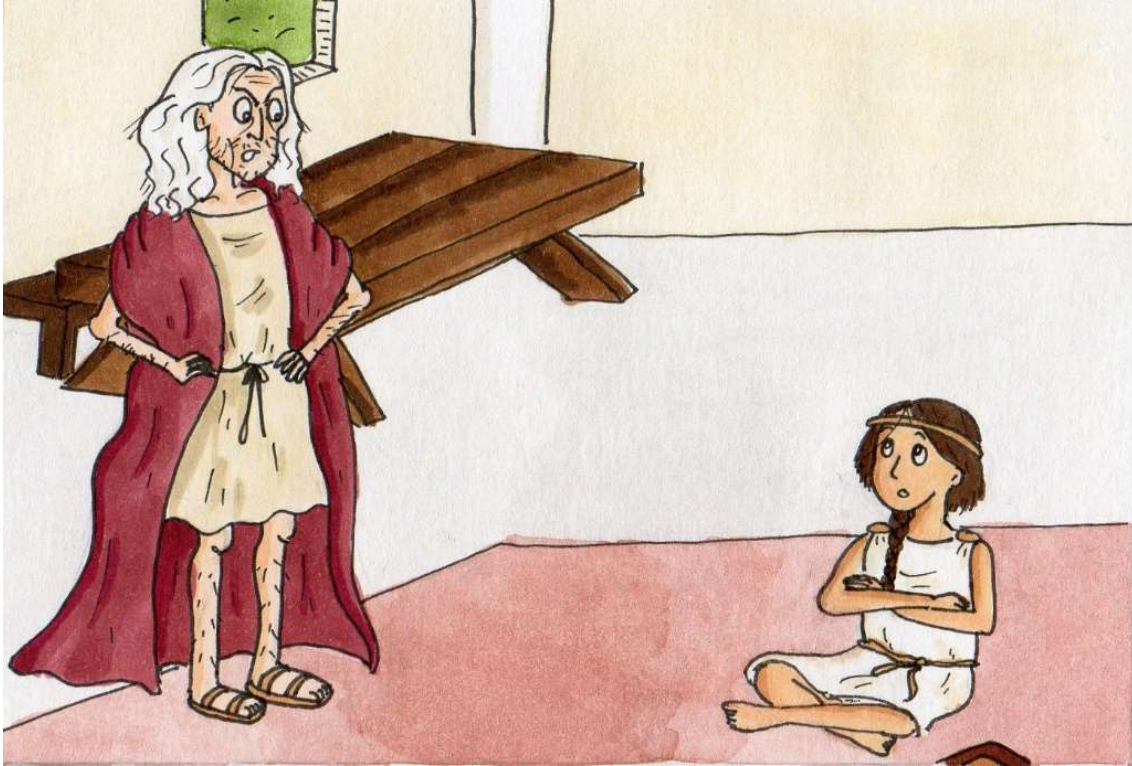
Meno smiled again, his white teeth catching the sunlight through the open door.

“I’m sure tomorrow, when we carry on you’ll...”

"No," Delphi interrupted. "I don't think so. You're fired."



Part II – Mr Locke



The old, frowning teacher stood at the front of Delphi's living room.

"Listen, girl! You will pay attention!"

Delphi snapped back upright and tried to look like she was listening. She had insisted on having another teacher after the last one had left. He had taken his shapes and his scrolls and departed, looking rather confused. Her father had been not overly pleased that Delphi had sacked her teacher on her first day of education, but as usual when he tried to argue with Delphi about it, she had refused to change her mind. So, she had demanded a new teacher, and sure enough, the next day, here he was.

"Now, you will repeat after me!" The teacher was another man, and had long, curly white hair and a strange foreign accent. He introduced himself as Mr Locke, which was a very strange name indeed. Delphi had never seen anybody like him. For one thing, he was so pale! He had apparently come into town that morning and was looking for work. It seemed a strange piece of luck.

"The area of a triangle is half of the product of the length of the two shortest sides!" he boomed.

Delphi blinked at him, slightly terrified. "The area of... what?"

"The area of a triangle is half of the product of the length of the two shortest sides! Repeat!"

Delphi took a deep breath. "The area of a... triangle is the two..."

"No! The area of a triangle is half of the product of the length of the two shortest sides!" The teacher glared at her, daring Delphi to get it wrong.

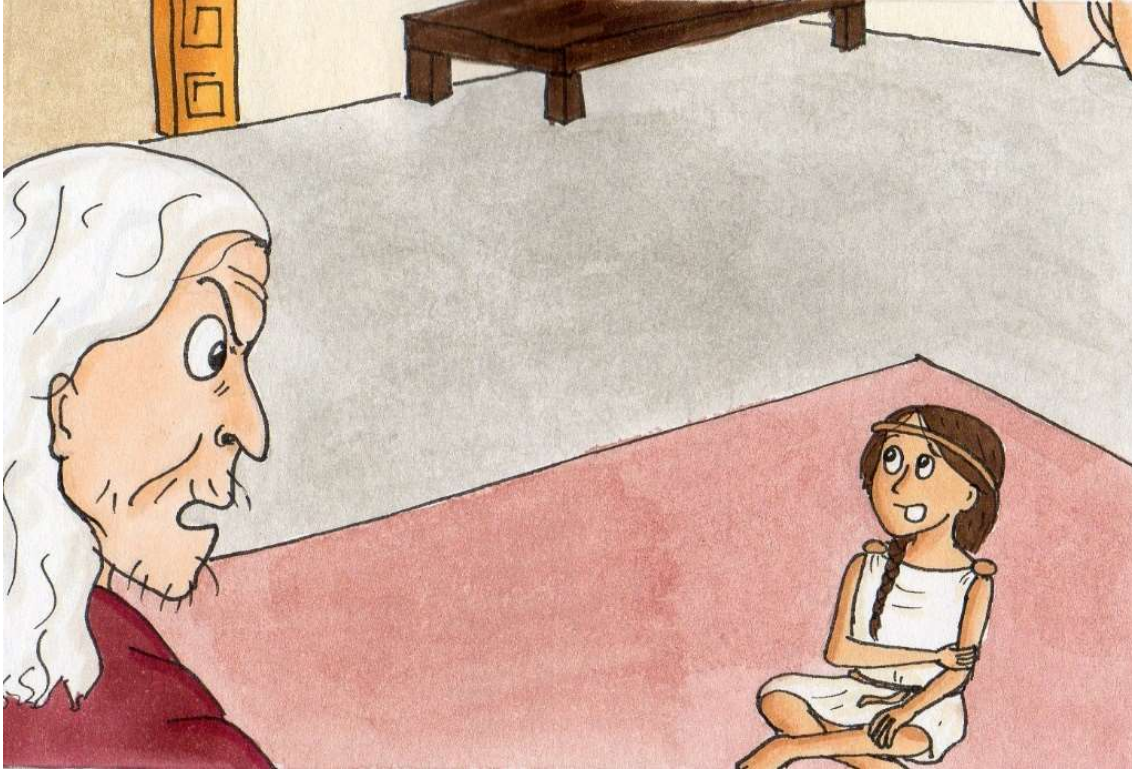
"The area of a triangle is... half of the product of the length of the two shortest sides?" Delphi grinned with relief.

"The area of a triangle is half of the product of the length of the two shortest sides!" the teacher repeated.

“The area of a triangle is half of the product of the length of the two shortest sides!” Delphi repeated. They were both getting louder.

“What is the area of a triangle?” Mr Locke looked at Delphi, waiting for the answer.

“What is the area of a triangle?” Delphi repeated.



“No, think girl!” He was looking even angrier now and he looked angry when he came in. “How would I find the area of a triangle?”

“Oh, um.... you would... um... half the length of...”

“No!” He barely blinked. “Again! The area of a triangle is half of the product of the length of the two shortest sides!” Delphi gulped. It had seemed like a good idea at first. At least he actually told you things rather than just making you guess.

“The area of a triangle is... half of the product of the length of the two shortest sides,” she mumbled again.

“Repeat! The area of a triangle is half of the product of the length of the two shortest sides!” the man declared again.

Delphi looked at him, puzzled.

“I know. I just told you that.”

“What is the area of a triangle?” He shot her another fierce look.

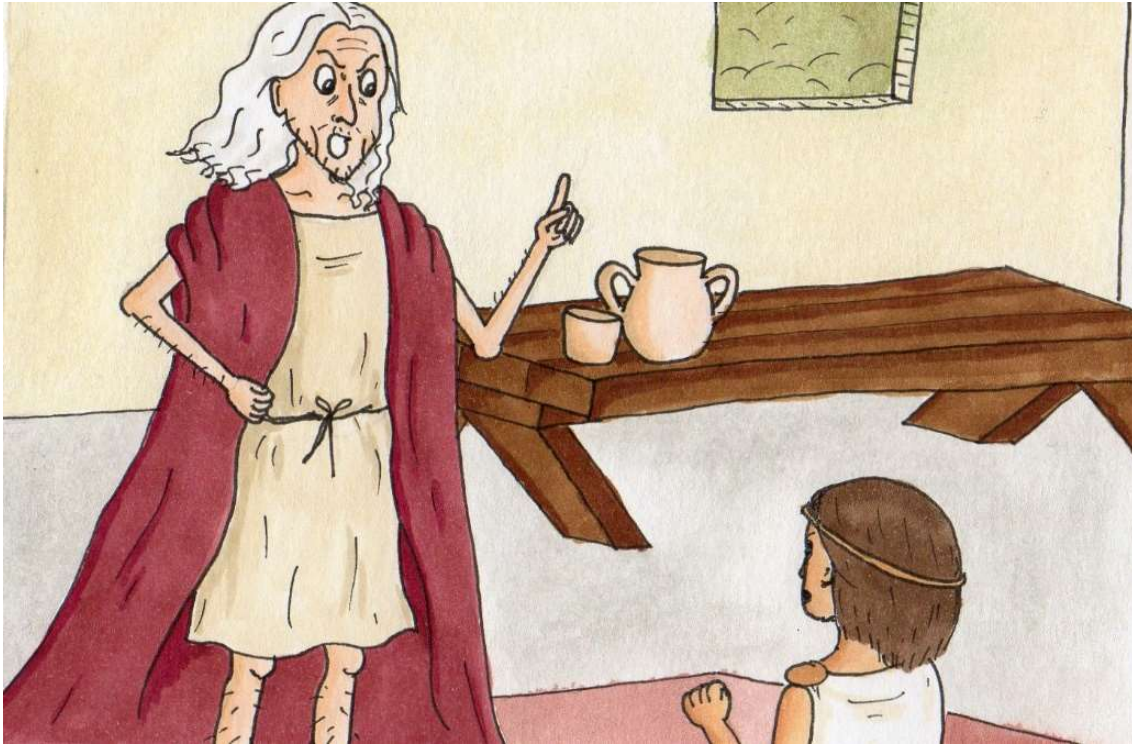
“Half of the product of the length of the two shortest sides!” she replied, in a slightly bored sing-song voice. “But what...”

“Repeat! The area of a triangle is half of the product of the length of the two shortest sides!”

“But I know that now! What does it mean anyway? What’s product?” Delphi looked up at him from her seat on the floor, but he seemed not to hear.

“Repeat!”

“But wait, I don’t understand!” Delphi protested, standing up. “I’m not learning anything!” Mr Locke finally stopped and seemed to look at her properly for the first time. His curly white hair flicked from the breeze coming through the doorway.



“Insolent girl, you will do as you are told! I am your teacher!” he snapped. “The area of a triangle is..?”
“Half the product of the length of the two shortest sides, but...”

Mr Locke looked triumphant. “Then you have learnt something. Now – repeat! The area of a triangle is...”
“But I don’t know what that means. What does it mean?” she insisted.

“No questions! Repeat!”

Delphi took a deep breath. No questions? What kind of a teacher was he? OK, he might tell her things that she didn’t know but if she couldn’t ask any questions, how could she make any sense of it?

“But isn’t learning just remembering? My old teacher told me that. It shouldn’t just be having to repeat what you say, should it?” Mr Locke looked put out that she had broken the rhythm of his teaching.

“Utter nonsense,” he muttered.

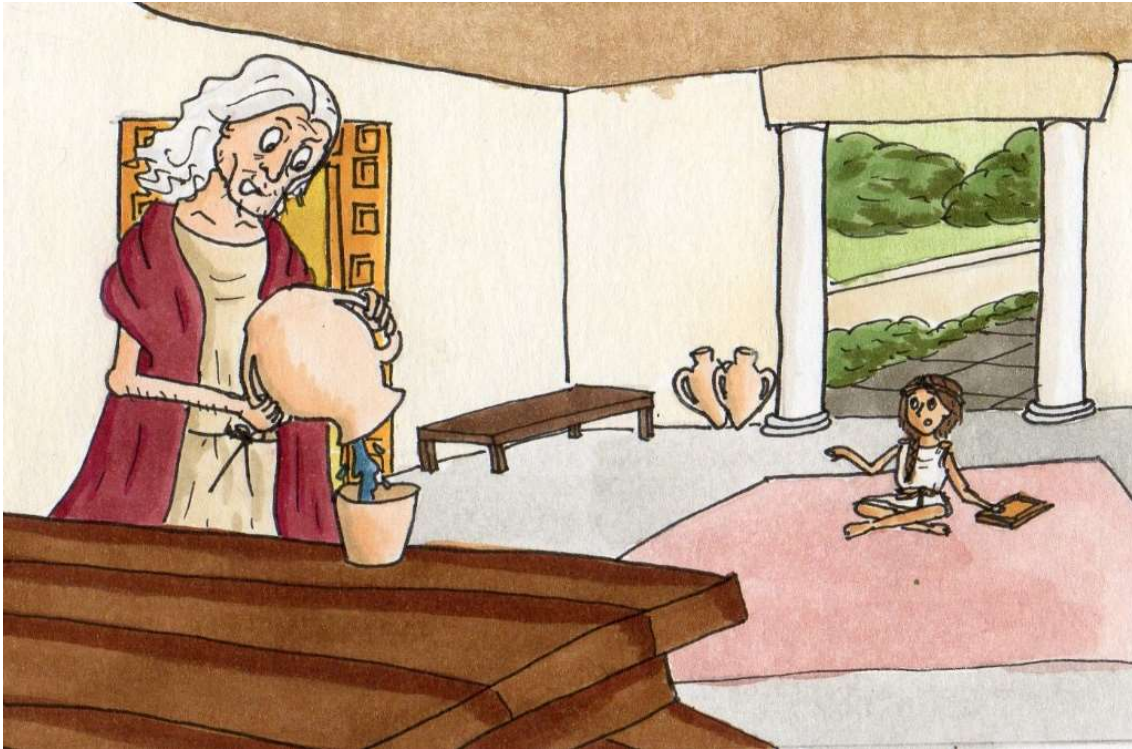
“Is it?”

The teacher sighed, and Delphi thought she heard his bones creak. He turned around and picked up a jug of water from the corner of the room.

“Look at your slate girl,” he said, his voice quieter. Delphi looked at the wax tablet on the floor next to her. She hadn’t written anything on it yet. She didn’t know how.

“It’s empty,” she said.

“Yes. As is your mind,” he said. Delphi felt offended by this, but it seemed the man didn’t mean it unkindly. “Or at least it was, when you were born. All people start with a blank slate. Then your experience fills it up. That is my job.” As if to demonstrate his point, he poured himself a cup of water from the jug. Delphi watched as the cup slowly filled up.



“So learning things is just having your head filled up with facts?” Delphi asked.

“Not just facts – ideas, virtues, values – everything that you require!” He took a long drink and let out a breath when he had finished. “There is nothing before you were born. All you learn is what you experience. And to learn you need patience, and discipline.” He put the cup down. “Now. Repeat! The area of a triangle is half of the product of the length of the two shortest sides!”

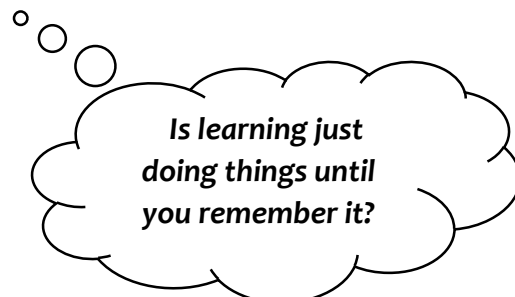
“Can I have some water?”

“No! Repeat!”

“But that’s not fair!”

“Repeat!”

Delphi’s mouth did the rest of the lesson. Her brain was thinking about what he said. She wasn’t exactly enjoying him being her teacher, but she had a horrible feeling he might be right. Isn’t learning just having facts and experiences poured into your brain like water from a jug?





Delphi tried to keep her patience with Mr Locke. She really did. She did want to learn and she was prepared to put up with his harsh voice and strict discipline. For an hour or two.

“Please can we have a break?” she begged, again, when they had been repeating the alphabet for what felt like the hundredth time.

“No! It is good for you to not get what you want. Repeat! Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta!”

“What?” Delphi asked, hardly believing her ears.

“Girl, you will repeat what I say or there will be consequences,” he said, narrowing her eyes at her. The way Mr Locke looked now would have caused any normal child to shrink and apologise before they got into even worse trouble. But Delphi had never been to school and learnt to be scared of teachers, so she just stared back at him.

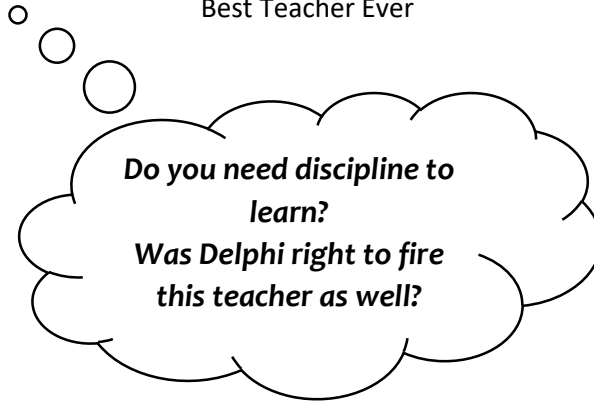
“No, wait! What do you mean, it’s not good for you to get what you want?”

“I will answer your question,” Mr Locke said sternly. “And then you will not ask another. Our aim is to make you a person of good knowledge and behaviour. These are formed when you are able to resist your petty and worthless desires. Discipline! Now, repeat!”

“No!” Delphi screamed, genuinely annoyed. “What good is that? I’m not just some... empty jug waiting for stuff to be poured in! I’ve got feelings and ideas too, you know!”

“They are not important,” Mr Locke snapped. Delphi bit her lip. “Now, repe...”

“You’re fired!” she shouted, and stormed out of her house.



Part III – Mi-syur Roo-so



The strangely dressed man, with the even stranger accent, stood at the front of Delphi's living room.

"It eez too dark and small in here. Let us go outside."

"What?"

Delphi almost couldn't understand what he was saying, even if she had been listening. Her new teacher – her third, and definitely last according to her father – seemed to come from some foreign land that Delphi had never heard of. He introduced himself as Mi-syur Roo-so, or something, and Delphi had immediately forgotten it and was now too embarrassed to ask. Quite where her father had pulled this one from she had no idea, but she quite liked the look of him so far. He hadn't told her what to do once.



After expecting to have to stay in for the rest of the day, Delphi was delighted to be going outside. Her teacher led her out the house, down the street and out towards the city gates. When Delphi asked him where they were going, he had said “Where zere eez ze right place to learn!” and she hadn’t quite understood him so didn’t ask again. But it was a warm day, with a few clouds taking the edge of the sun’s heat, and she skipped happily along, thinking that finally she might have found her perfect teacher after all.

They walked through the gates and outside the city walls, until the houses became more spread out and the patchy shrubs of the countryside started poking through the yellow ground. They paused when they reached a small farm on the edge of the city and her new teacher looked around and seemed satisfied.

“Here eez a good place. Here you can learn,” he declared, and put down his bag. Delphi looked at him curiously. He looked very out of place with his thick white shirt and strange jacket made from some material she didn’t recognise. His thick brown hair was swept into a parting, and he wore a bizarre round hat that the wind was threatening to blow back towards the city. She was half thinking her dad was playing a joke on her.



“What shall I do?” she asked. Her teacher sat down on a grassy rock next to the trail and shrugged.

“Play?” he suggested.

“What, really?” Delphi asked. Wow, he really was the perfect teacher!

“Of course,” he replied.



So Delphi did. She ran around the little farm and found they had a total of sixteen goats in the square paddock. She chased them for a while before learning it’s a good idea to leave goats alone before they get really angry at you. She tried throwing some pebbles down an old well at the edge of the field and counted how long they took to go plop. She found a damson tree and managed to find a few that didn’t

taste rotten or have maggots in them. She even took a stick and tried to draw a few shapes into the dirt. But it wasn't really very long until she got a bit bored and ran back to Mi-syur Roo-so to see what he was doing.

He was asleep.

However, she could see that he had scattered a few small pieces of wood on the grass nearby. She picked one up. It was a triangle.



"Would you like me to tell you about zat?" Her teacher was looking up at her.

"I thought you were asleep!" The man shrugged again. She looked at the carving. It didn't look particularly worth learning. "Not really," she said, dropping it back on the floor.

"As you wish," he said, softly, and closed his eyes again.

Delphi stood still, looking at him for almost a minute, thinking.

"Aren't you going to teach me anything?" she asked. He opened his eyes again.

"I have bought you to zees place." He gestured to the grass, the fields, the goats. "Have you learnt anyzing from it yet?" Delphi considered.

"Goats sometimes do a poo when you keep pulling their tails?" Her teacher looked uncertain.

"Zat will do. But zere is much more you can learn here," he said, and he looked away again, as if wanting her to go away.

"How much is my dad paying you?" Delphi asked, sharply. That woke him up.

"I'm sorry?"

"I mean, you are a teacher, right? Shouldn't you be, I dunno, telling me what to do or something?"

The man took off his ridiculous hat and wiped the sweat off his forehead.



“You may not understand zis but I will answer your question,” he said. “Zere is only one true teacher and zat is Nature. You will learn best by being out of ze city, with its distractions and ze corruption of eets people. Education... she must not be forced. You will learn, as you are ready to learn. It is ze environment zat eez key.”

This was the most the man had said all day, and she had barely understood a word of it.

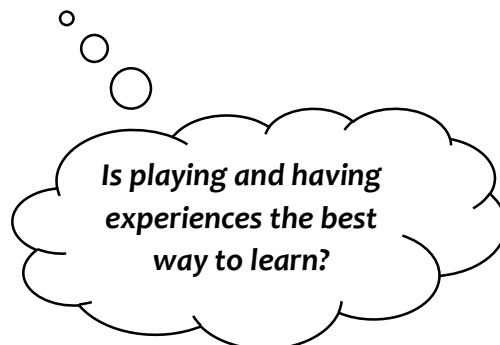
“What? I don’t know what you mean!”

“I mean,” he answered, “Ze best way to learn, for a girl your age, eez to play and grow and not try to learn too much while you are too young. You are free, innocent, beautiful!” He held up his hands to her and Delphi almost stepped away in surprise.

“So the best way for me to learn is just to play? I don’t need anyone else to tell me what to do?” Delphi had to admit, it was quite an appealing idea. Her teacher nodded.

“People in zere natural state are basically good. It eez ze evils of society zat corrupt us!” And with that, Mi-syur Roo-so leaned back down and closed his eyes again. Delphi hadn’t a clue what he had just said.

But maybe that doesn’t matter, she thought. Perhaps she doesn’t need anyone to tell her what to do. It wasn’t like he hadn’t answered her questions. Surely, she would just learn best by being allowed to do what she wants. Wouldn’t she?



Delphi rather enjoyed the rest of her 'lesson' with Mi-syur Roo-so. She asked him the odd question, mainly about goats, but mostly she just plodded around the farm and the fields. But he didn't know that much about goats, and soon she was tired of entertaining herself and found that she was getting sleepy. Eventually, she dozed off on a small mound of soil.



She woke when the first raindrop hit her cheek.

The day was getting on and the sky was now filled with sultry clouds, which were sending a light shower over the city. Delphi shivered. Without the sunlight, it felt rather cold. She was hungry too.

She looked around to find her teacher, and saw that he was still there, seemingly not having moved. She wandered over to him, feeling the rain on the tops of her bare feet.



"It's raining," she said. He opened one eye, slowly.

"It eez," he agreed.

"Are we going home then?" she asked. There was a pause.

"No," he said, shortly.

"What? Why not?"

"It eez good for you. Ze rain, a bit of ze cold. Make you strong." He appeared to be serious. Delphi looked up. More clouds were sweeping in from the direction of the sea, and they looked like they meant business.

"But I'll get soaked out here!" she moaned. But her teacher just nodded.

"I might die!" Delphi said, loudly.

"I... don't think zo," her teacher replied. Delphi shook her head. Was he going to keep her outside all the time? She would be allowed to go home again... wouldn't she?

"I'm going home!" she declared, and started marching away. She took about ten steps before she realised she had absolutely no idea where she was, or indeed where home was. She marched back again.

"Take me home! I'm cold!"

"No,"

"I'll cry!" Delphi declared, slightly embarrassed to be trying this line.

"Zat does not matter." Mi-syur Roo-so had barely moved in all this time. He still looked as though he was sunbathing on a pleasant summer's afternoon, rather than lying in an increasingly muddy puddle. His strange clothes seemed to be getting stained and his hat had gone floppy. She would have found it funny if she hadn't been absolutely furious.

She opened and closed her mouth a few times.

“How long am I going to stay out here?” she demanded, a slight shiver of panic running up her chest. She met her teacher’s eyes.

The man cleared his throat. “How old are you again?”

Delphi bit down a sob.

“You’re fired!” she screamed. “You’re fired! You’re fired! You’re fired!” And even as she started crying, and the rain grew heavier around her, she ran as fast she could in what she hoped was the general direction of the city. She hoped she’d never have to see another teacher again, for as long as she lived.



**Should Delphi have fired
this teacher too?
Do you learn by having
bad experiences?**

Epilogue



“So how long did it take you to get home?” Plato asked, trying not to laugh.

Delphi, who was sitting by the fire holding a hot drink and wrapped in a blanket, decided not to dignify that with an answer.

“Teachers are stupid,” she said slowly, almost spitting each word into the fire.

Plato couldn’t stop a giggle escape but choked it back again when Delphi gave him another one of her Looks.

“I did try and warn you,” he pointed out.

Delphi shivered and took another sip of her drink. She was still slightly scared that one of her teachers might come back and try and make her learn something. Probably about triangles. She kept an eye on the door, and just in case, had pushed the table against it to keep out any other teachers who might be passing.

“It’s not my fault,” she mumbled. She blew on her drink, sending a pleasant little cloud of steam up into her face.

“It’s not exactly the teachers’ faults though either, is it? They were just doing their jobs.”

“But they were rubbish!” Delphi said, looking up at him. “The first one thought he didn’t need to tell me *anything*, the second one thought he needed to tell me *everything* and the third one seemed to think I didn’t need to even *think* about anything!”

Plato shrugged. “Maybe they all had a point?” Delphi shook her head.

“No, I’ve decided. It’s no good just learning from one person is it? You’ll just... get all their stupid ideas along with their good ones.” She closed her eyes, letting the warmth of the fire take the last shivers of cold from her skin.

“My old teacher, Socrates – he was a good teacher,” she heard Plato say.

“Perfect?”

“Maybe not perfect. But sometimes he asked you questions, and sometimes he told you things, and sometimes he let you figure it out on your own. Maybe that’s as good as it gets.”

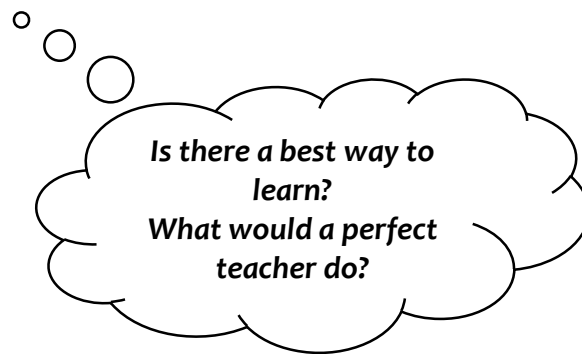
They sat in a comfortable silence for a few seconds. Delphi ruined it by suddenly shouting.

“Yeah, but how do you actually learn? Didn’t Socrates used to say that he didn’t really know anything? If you don’t know anything, then how are we supposed to learn anything? If Socrates didn’t know anything, how are we supposed to?”

Plato shrugged. “I don’t know.”

“I don’t know either.”

They looked at each other and laughed.



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This story is primarily based on the ideas of Plato’s dialogue ‘Meno’, John Locke’s ‘Some Thoughts Concerning Education (1693) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s ‘Emile’ (1762). Details of life in ancient Athens are drawn from many sources, such as The World of Athens (Cambridge University Press, 2008). Delphi Philosophy stories are fictional but have been written to at least be consistent with historical events and practices. Any errors in that regard are my own.