

# The story of the two houses and the flower

*Have you ever heard the story of the grey house, the green house and the flower? It happened in a place pretty much like this one.*

*It was a nice area with nice people, good houses, and lovely nature. There were sunny days, rainy days, windy days, stormy days and quiet days. It was light at day and dark at night. Along the main road were shops with nice things to buy and people were driving around, all busy with their lives.*

*And on a little hill in the middle of it all were two houses: the grey house and the green house.*

*In many ways they looked alike. In each house 10 children lived, boys and girls. And they were all nice, sweet children. Some were older, others were younger, some were big, others were small, some were quiet, and some were noisy. Some had long hair some had short hair, some of them liked talking with others and some of them liked to be alone once in a while. In each house were two adults to look after the kids.*

*So, in many ways the grey house and the green house looked very much alike. But if you came to visit and looked closer at the children in the two houses, you would see the difference.*

*In the grey house the children were sad. In the green house they were happy and healthy.*

*The grey house didn't have any colors. The rooms all looked sad, there were holes in the walls and the furniture were broken and worn. In one of the corners was a hole in the roof so the rain poured in and the wooden floor under the hole was starting to rotten. Everybody knew about the hole, but nobody did anything.*

*The grey house was always dirty because nobody cleaned it. "Why should we clean up the mess? It is so dirty and sad anyway", the children said. Nobody helped each other. "Why should we help others?", the children asked, "nobody is helping us!" So, it is not surprising that the children in the grey house all ended up being unhappy.*

*The green house, on the other hand, was filled with life, laugh and colors. Not because it was full of fancy things, but because the children took good care of their things and whenever something broke, they fixed it. They all felt nice about their place, and sometimes they made small decorations with flowers and paintings because it felt good to give each other a nice feeling. And they all helped one another. "It is*

*so nice that you are helping me", the children often said. And the answer was something like "well, its just because I like to help you, and because I like very much all the times that you have helped me".*

Pause the reading and ask the children what they think about the two houses. Let them guess other elements of the two houses and create their own version of them. But remember to keep the basic points: Green represents a nice, happy, healthy, sustainable place and grey represents the opposite.

*One day, an old woman came to the two houses, and she spend some time looking around, asking the children about their lives and how it was to live in these houses. One afternoon, when she was sitting with the children from the grey house, they told her that they would very much like to live in the green house instead of the grey. "Would you like to change your grey house so it is more like the green house?" the old woman asked. And all the children nodded their small heads.*

*The old woman showed them a flower with four leaves. "This little flower brings luck", she said. "How is that possible", asked the children, "it is such a small and fragile plant".*

*"It is because", answered the woman, "each of the four leaves has a meaning".*

*"The name of the first leaf is Focus, which means that the first step in making positive changes is to find a focus for what you want to change. If you want to change your house from a grey to a green house, you need to find out more specifically what you want to change".*

*"How can we do that?", asked the children.*

*"Well", said the old woman, "that is where leaf number two comes into the picture. You have to open your eyes and ears and observe. The name of the second leaf is Observation. Let us play a little game. Even though you have lived in this house for a long time, you can imagine that you visit for the first time. Just like I did a few days ago", said the old woman. Look at the things inside and outside the house and feel inside yourself: which things make me feel like I am in the grey house and which things make me feel like being in the green house?"*

*"What about the last two leaves, what are their names?", the children asked.*

*"The name of the third leaf is Ideas", the old woman answered. "Focus and Observation is not enough to make change, but is it a good start. However, after that, you need good ideas to make things more green than grey."*

*One little girl was sitting and listening quietly to the old woman and the other children. Then she raised her hand and said with her tiny voice: "Sometimes I feel a*

*little sad when I sit in my bed looking at my things. I would like it to have more colors and joy". The old woman listened to the girl and said: "Let us go have a look, maybe we can get some ideas for a good solution". And then they all went up to the little girl's bed.*

*The little girl said: "When I look at my bed and my bookcase, I think it all looks a bit messy and sad. And my bed blanket is full of holes. It is a nice warm blanket, but I don't think the holes look nice. That is one of the reasons that I am feeling sad in the grey house". And the little girl continued: "But I also have an idea! I think it could be nice if I painted the bookcase in a lot of colors. And then I will try to put all my things in order. I would very much like that".*

*All the other children thought it sounded like a good idea. "I know where to find some different colored paint we can use", one boy said and he hurried downstairs with a few of the other children right behind him. And one of the older girls said "I'm really good at painting flowers, and I would like to help you paint the bookcase if you want me to". And suddenly they all felt like helping each other make these changes. They emptied the bookcase, and painted it in nice colors, and with beautiful flowers on it. Another girl in the group was sitting in the back on the bed looking at the holes in the blanket. Suddenly she got an idea. She found a bunch of old, colorful T-shirts that nobody used anymore. And after a short while some of the children were sitting with needle and thread, covering the holes in the blanket with round colorful pieces of cloth cut out from the old T-shirts. When they were done the blanket looked like a garden full of flowers in different colors.*

*Of course the little girl was very happy and the day after, when the paint had dried, she made a nice order with all her things. And many of the other children did the same. After a while, it all looked much nicer in their bedroom and children even started to help each other keeping the room clean and pleasant.*

Pause the reading and ask the children about the good things that are happening. Help them to see that they are changing their house from grey to green by pointing out what they do to:

- Make their house nice and happy
- Help each other
- Do it with their own resources, that is, with things that are at hand.

*The old woman was also very pleased and happy, because she saw how the grey house started to look more and more like a green house. It was time for her to leave, so she said goodbye to all the children. Before she went on, she painted a flower with four leaves on a big piece of paper as a gift to the kids. "This is a memory of me", she said. "But also a reminder to you all, that you can change things from grey to green".*

*"But you never told us about the last leaf", a boy whispered.*

*"That is true", the old woman responded, "I must have forgotten. But actually, you already know all about the last leaf, which is the most important of it all".*

*"What is it?", the children asked.*

*"The name of the last leaf is Change", she said. And that is exactly what you did when you all worked together and helped the little girl to change her bookcase and blanket from grey to green. So remember the four leaves: Focus, Observation, Ideas and Change. It is always possible to do something to change your life from grey to green".*

*A boy was standing in a corner, listening to the old woman. He looked confused and then said: "I don't like rain! I hate rain; the rain is the greyest thing for me. But I have no idea how to stop the rain."*

*The old woman painted a circle around the flower.*

*"What is that?" the boy asked. "This is the circle of 'realistic optimism'", the old woman answered. "Things that are outside the circle, you cannot do anything about. Just like the rain: you cannot stop it. But it is important to look for things inside the circle; realistic optimistic things. Changes you actually can make!"*

*And then the children started to discuss what the boy realistically could do about his rain-problem. To stop the rain was outside the circle. But what was inside? Maybe he could use an umbrella? Or stay inside the house? Or try to become friends with the rain by playing with the water? Or he could find funny things to do when it rained, so that he could look forward to the next it rained?*

*The old woman was listening to the children's ideas, while she walked away smiling.*

When you have finished the story, give the children a moment to think about it and then discuss it with them. Did they understand everything? Do they have any questions? What did they like about the story? Any dislikes? What do they think they can use it for?