The wise teacher and the jar

There was once a very wise teacher, whose words of wisdom students would come from far and wide to hear. One day as usual, many students began to gather in the teaching room. They came in and sat down very quietly, looking to the front with keen anticipation, ready to hear what the teacher had to say.

Eventually the teacher came in and sat down in front of the students. The room was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. On one side of the teacher was a large glass jar. On the other side was a pile of dark grey rocks. Without saying a word, the teacher began to pick up the rocks one by one and place them very carefully in the glass jar (Plonk. Plonk.) When all the rocks were in the jar, the teacher turned to the students and asked, 'Is the jar full?' 'Yes,' said the students. 'Yes, teacher, the jar is full'.

Without saying a word, the teacher began to drop small round pink pebbles carefully into the large glass jar so that they fell down between the rocks. (Clickety click. Clickety click.) When all the pebbles were in the jar, the teacher turned to the students and asked, 'Is the jar now full?' The students looked at one another and then some of them started nodding and saying, 'Yes. Yes, teacher, the jar is now full. Yes'.

Without saying a word, the teacher took some fine silver sand and let it trickle with a gentle sighing sound into the large glass jar (whoosh) where it settled around the pink pebbles and the dark grey rocks. When all the sand was in the jar, the teacher turned to the students and asked, 'Is the jar now full?'

The students were not so confident this time, but the sand had clearly filled all the space in the jar so a few still nodded and said, 'Yes, teacher, the jar is now full. Now it's full'.

Without saving a word, the teacher took a jug of water and poured it carefully, without splashing a drop, into the large glass jar. (Gloog. Gloog.)

When the water reached the brim, the teacher turned to the students and asked, 'Is the jar now full?' Most of the students were silent, but two or three ventured to answer, 'Yes, teacher, the jar is now full. Now it is'.

Without saying a word, the teacher took a handful of salt and sprinkled it slowly over the top of the water with a very quiet whishing sound. (Whish.) When all the salt had dissolved into the water, the teacher turned to the students and asked once more, 'Is the jar now full?' The students were totally silent. Eventually one brave student said, 'Yes, teacher. The jar is now full'. 'Yes,' said the teacher 'The jar is now full'.

The teacher then said: 'A story always has many meanings and you will each have understood many things from this demonstration. Discuss quietly amongst yourselves what meanings the story has for you. How many different messages can you find in it and take from it?'

The students looked at the wise teacher and at the beautiful glass jar filled with grey rocks, pink pebbles, silver sand, water and salt. Then they quietly discussed with one another the meanings the story had for them. After a few minutes, the wise teacher raised one hand and the room fell silent. The teacher said: 'Remember that there is never just one interpretation of anything. You have all taken away many meanings and messages from the story, and each meaning is as important and as valid as any other'.

And without saying another word, the teacher got up and left the room.