

Foreword

Once upon a time ...

“So this is a fairy tale,” you might say.

And in a way you’d be right. It is about *The Adventures of Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi, a story that feels like a fairy tale.

But in another way, you’d be wrong. I won’t tell you a fairy tale about Pinocchio. I’ll tell you the truth, as I’ve learned to read it.

So let us begin again.

Once upon a time, there was a little boy made of wood. His nose had a strange life of its own. It grew when he told lies. He longed to become human, and in the end, he did. His story has been told to children all over the world.

One day, however, it became clear that this story was not meant for children alone. The boy’s nose grew for another reason, as we’ll see in a moment. Collodi’s tale carries secrets that touch us all.

Nearly one hundred and fifty years have passed since Pinocchio’s adventures first appeared. Yet their deeper meaning has remained hidden to this day.

To find it, we must set out on a journey into our cultural heritage: the Bible, Egyptian and Greek mythology, and the

wisdom of the East. All of this lies quietly within *Pinocchio*.

Along the way, we'll meet other stories that belong to the wider Pinocchio universe. How might Prometheus escape the punishment for stealing fire? Jesus has an idea. What remained in Pandora's box and troubles our lives to this day? And what exactly happened in Paradise, in that moment that changed everything?

These and many other stories beyond time and space invite reflection. They open unexpected perspectives on who we are, where we come from, and where we may be going.

For years, I returned to *Pinocchio* again and again, following every clue, turning every detail over. In doing so, I came to know a quiet, transformative power, one that is accessible to us all. It carried me through a difficult time and led me to a realization that could hardly be more profound: every lasting change begins within us. That understanding brings responsibility, but also freedom and happiness.

And so, while this book is about Pinocchio's secrets and other thought-provoking stories, at heart it is also a mirror. If you are on your own journey, perhaps you may find that this mirror has been quietly waiting for you.

What will you see?

Part One

How could a little boy made of wood become human?

You may know the line often attributed to Albert Einstein: "No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness at which it was created." That's exactly how Pinocchio's world works, as this book will gradually reveal.

In Pinocchio's world, consciousness is not an abstract idea but a creative force. It determines what he sees, what form his body takes, and even what happens around him. In his world, reality itself is shaped by consciousness and free will.

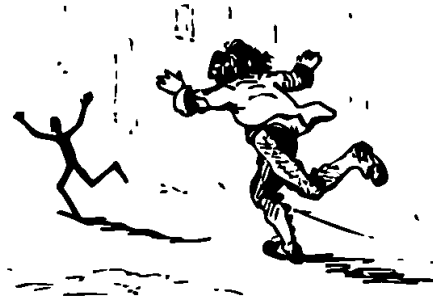
And now let's look at Pinocchio's nose. In the entire story, it grows only twice when he lies. Just as often, it grows when he doesn't lie. More than once, he lies and nothing happens at all.

Shouldn't that make us pause?

As we'll discover, Pinocchio's nose doesn't grow because of lies. It grows when he's caught in an unconscious pattern, running entirely on autopilot.

But let's go back to where it all began ...

1. Born an Egoist



Pinocchio's story begins in the workshop of Master Cherry, a carpenter. At this point Pinocchio is still just "a simple piece of wood." We know almost nothing about him: from which tree did he come? What happened to that tree? How did this piece of wood end up in Master Cherry's shop?

We can imagine Master Cherry as a no-nonsense woodworker, perhaps with a drinking problem. After all, his nickname comes from the color of his nose: "always shiny and purple, like a ripe cherry."

Master Cherry is searching for wood to make a table leg. When he finds this particular piece, he's pleased. He raises his tools to start working on it. But again and again, he hears noises no piece of wood should make: "Don't hit me so hard!" "Ow! That hurt!" "Stop that! You're tickling me!"

The carpenter, unsettled, searches his surroundings for the voice, even checking a cupboard that's always locked. Just as he sits on the floor of his workshop, utterly confused, Geppetto enters the scene. The woodcarver is looking for material to carve into a puppet. Master Cherry gladly hands him the mysterious piece of wood. But first, the two friends get into a fight, not once but twice. The "simple piece of wood" has set them against each other and seems to enjoy the drama.

Once carved into a puppet, Pinocchio bursts into the world like a whirlwind, testing Geppetto's patience at every turn. The puppet cares only for his own amusement and follows his impulses wherever they lead. Perhaps that's why Collodi draws on the animal world to describe his first exploits: Pinocchio "hopped like a hare," "skipped like a kid goat," and "panted like a hunting dog", to name only a few.

Such impulsive behavior has consequences. When Geppetto tries to discipline the reckless puppet, he spends a night in jail. A talking cricket fares even worse: when it points out Pinocchio's misbehavior, he lashes out in anger and strikes it down with a wooden mallet.

As night falls, with a winter storm raging outside, Pinocchio falls asleep in Geppetto's room. But the tragedy isn't over: He doesn't realize his feet are slowly burning away in the fire ...



Is this really the cherished little puppet we think we know?

Pinocchio allowed Geppetto to carve him into a puppet, yet shows no trace of gratitude. On the contrary, we encounter a Pinocchio who is impulsive and deeply inconsiderate. He even kills the cricket in a moment of rage, without the slightest sign of remorse.

Let's try to understand Pinocchio's behavior more clearly. He has had a body for just a few hours. For the first time, he can move and explore the world. Collodi has endowed him with emotions that closely mirror our own: Pinocchio can feel joy, hunger, fear, despair, sadness, anger, and he can stomp his feet in frustration.

How well has his consciousness kept pace with these physical changes? He has had no social contact so far. How could he possibly be ready for that? On the day of his "birth," is he even capable of seeing beyond his own needs?

I believe Pinocchio's mind still needs time to build the internal wiring required for social interaction. He has to gather experiences, as many as he can, in order to grow. Also the cricket's final words suggest that, above all, the freshly carved puppet now needs to develop his mind:

“Poor Pinocchio! I really feel sorry for you.”

“Why do you feel sorry for me?”

“Because you’re a puppet – and worse than that,
you’ve got a wooden head.”

For me, these lines capture the core theme of the story. The “simple piece of wood” has become a puppet, but that’s only the beginning of the journey. Pinocchio must now lose his wooden head.



Doesn’t Pinocchio’s first day of life resemble our own?

When we’re born, we also begin a journey. We too must gather experiences throughout our lives. It’s the only way we begin to understand the world and ourselves.

When a small child sees a cricket for the first time, it might excitedly point at the little insect and shout “Fly!” The parents might then explain that it’s actually a cricket, and how crickets differ from flies. In that moment, the child has a new experience and can learn from it.

Our ability to learn from experience is almost limitless. The human brain has around 100 billion neurons, each connected to about 5,000 others. The possible states our brains

can take on are beyond imagination. Well into old age we can form and reshape the circuits we need to perceive, think, and interact with the world.

Pinocchio too can grow beyond his wooden head. He can now gather experiences and, thanks to his free will, he can learn from them. The next chapter will show how quickly he does so.

2. It's All in the Mind



The next morning, Pinocchio makes a painful discovery: overnight, his feet have burned away in the fire.

Fortunately, Geppetto has returned from prison. He lovingly cares for his foster son. First, he gives him his own breakfast: three pears. Pinocchio devours them, but refuses to eat the peels and cores. Still hungry, he finally eats them after all.

Then Geppetto carves him new feet. They fit perfectly. Pinocchio is beside himself with joy and promises to go to school from now on. But what should he wear? Geppetto makes him shoes, a little tunic, and a hat. Pinocchio proudly gazes into a basin of water and sees in his reflection a “real gentleman.”

Only one thing is missing before he can go to school: a spelling book. To buy it, Geppetto sells his only jacket, in the

middle of winter. For the first time Pinocchio feels genuine love for his foster father.

Soon he's on his way to school, his book tucked under his arm. In vivid color he imagines how quickly he will now learn to read and write, earn money, and buy Geppetto a splendid new jacket.

Moments later Pinocchio spots a puppet theater, and all his resolutions vanish. School can wait until tomorrow. When he enters, Harlequin, Pulcinella, and the other wooden puppets instantly recognize him as their brother. The performance ends in an uproar. Only the strict director Fire-Eater manages to restore order.

Soon Fire-Eater needs wood to roast a ram, and Pinocchio faces death by fire. He begs for his life and is spared. But when Fire-Eater decides to use Harlequin instead, Pinocchio suddenly offers himself as firewood in his friend's place. Once again, Fire-Eater softens. He spares them all and eats his ram half cooked. All the puppets are saved from the fire and dance joyfully until dawn.



What an extraordinary turn of events! On only his second day of life, Pinocchio tumbles from joy to despair and back again.

Just yesterday he learned to walk, and already he takes it for granted. Now, as he regains his feet after having lost them, he's "completely beside himself with joy" simply to walk again.

We see the same roller coaster in the puppet theater. At first, Pinocchio desperately resists being thrown into the fire ("I don't want to die, I don't want to die!"), only to offer himself moments later as firewood ("I know my duty").

The pears tell a similar story. For a long time he refuses to eat them whole ("I can't stand the skins", "I really won't eat the core"). In the end, he does, and it doesn't seem so bad at all ("Happily, he patted his belly with both hands").



These scenes illustrate something we know from our own lives: the very same event can trigger entirely different reactions.

For me, it is the most natural thing in the world to be able to move. But if, like Pinocchio, I were to lose that ability and then regain it, my attitude would change dramatically. At least for a while, I would surely feel deeply grateful just to be able to walk again. Wouldn't you feel the same?

This points to something essential: our thoughts, feelings,

and bodily sensations don't arise from outside events but from the way we interpret those events.

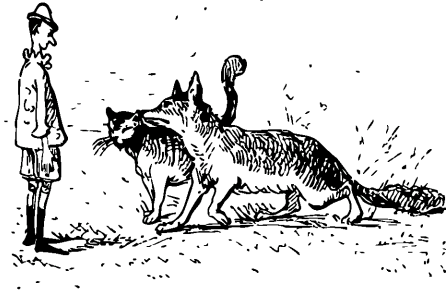
The Greek philosopher Epictetus (c. 55–135 AD) put it this way: “It is not things themselves that trouble people, but their opinion about things.”¹We'll read more from Epictetus later, as well as the surprising parallels he shares with Geppetto and Pinocchio.

And what shapes our opinion about things? Our consciousness. It is consciousness that lets us experience the world. How an apple tastes, whether we find it beautiful, what it stirs in us, we owe all of this to consciousness. And our consciousness changes constantly, with every single experience since birth.

We can therefore judge the same event very differently, depending on the state of consciousness we are in. Strictly speaking, our emotions don't come from the outside world at all. We generate them ourselves, by perceiving the world through the lens of our consciousness.

It's the same for Pinocchio. His perception depends on his consciousness. It determines not only what he sees, but even whether he sees anything at all. In the next chapter we'll find a beautiful example of this.

3. Blind Trust



The next day Pinocchio leaves the puppet theater. Five gold coins jingle in his pocket, a gift from Fire-Eater for poor Geppetto.

On his way home, he meets a lame Fox and a blind Cat. Openhearted, he tells them about his unexpected wealth and how he has now become a “real gentleman.” They advise him to plant the coins in the Field of Miracles. By morning they will have grown into two thousand, even two thousand five hundred, gold coins.

We readers sense the trick at once, but Pinocchio does not. Nor does he notice that the lameness and blindness are only an act. When a white blackbird warns him, the Cat opens his eyes and devours it. Pinocchio misses even this warning sign. Entranced by the promise of sudden wealth, he joins the two swindlers.

The day ends at an inn. Soon Pinocchio is fast asleep, dreaming of the many gold coins that seem to be waiting just for him. He has no idea what trouble lies ahead.



Each time I read about Pinocchio's first encounter with the Fox and the Cat, I can't help but shudder. How can our hero walk into such an obvious trap, overlooking every warning sign along the way?

Let's not forget: not long ago, Pinocchio was only a simple piece of wood. He had likely never been lied to before. He had no experience of others acting with bad intentions. And without the consciousness of such things, how could he recognize deception at all?



Is it really true that we perceive only what we are conscious of?

About a hundred years ago, the Austrian physicist Erwin Schrödinger, a pioneer of quantum theory, described consciousness as so fundamental that it cannot be explained in physical terms.² He may be right, since to this day we have no

scientific proof of how consciousness arises.³

I grew up with the notion that consciousness comes from the brain, but that has never been proven. You can see it differently. The ancient Egyptians held the heart to be the seat of consciousness. Since antiquity there have also been theories that even inorganic matter might possess consciousness.

We may not fully understand consciousness, but we can experience it. Suppose we were to meet Master Cherry in our own lives. The impression he makes on us is due to our consciousness. Without consciousness such an experience would not be possible. It is absolutely fundamental to how we encounter the world.

These experiences are also deeply personal. I can tell others what impression Master Cherry's nose left on me. But the experience itself is mine alone. Nor can I step into someone else's experience to feel what his nose stirs in them. No one can ever feel the world exactly as another does.

Our consciousness even determines whether we notice something at all. A simple experiment shows this. Do you see your own nose? I usually don't, even though it is in my field of view. My brain is clearly filtering that information, since it is of little use. But if I close one eye and then the other, I suddenly see my nose. When I open both eyes again, my nose remains present for a while, because I have directed my con-

sciousness to it. I keep seeing it as long as I remain aware of it.

This brings us back to Pinocchio: at his first encounter with the Fox and the Cat, he has no consciousness of deceit, because he has not yet experienced deceit. He therefore also lacks the ability to recognize its signs.

4. Fight or Flight



Pinocchio walks alone through the dark night. His companions have left the inn without warning. On his way, he meets the ghost of the talking cricket, who warns him of an ambush. Once again, Pinocchio ignores the advice. How mistaken he is.

Before long, two masked bandits stand in his path. At first they seize him, but he fights back with all his strength. In the end he frees himself by biting off one of the attacker's hands. It turns out to be a cat's paw.

What follows is an hours-long chase that drives Pinocchio to the limits of his strength. In a dark forest he finally reaches a snow-white house. At the window appears a beautiful girl with a wax-pale face and deep blue hair. Without opening her eyes or moving her lips she tells him that everyone in the house is dead, herself included. Then she closes the window

before the desperate Pinocchio.

Soon after, the bandits catch him. Stubbornly, he clenches the gold coins beneath his tongue, for they are meant for his beloved Geppetto. The robbers hang Pinocchio from an old oak tree, planning to return the next day to find him dead and the gold within easy reach.



It is the fourth day of Pinocchio's life. Already for the second time he faces mortal danger, and this time it seems far more serious, far more real than in the puppet theater. We can only guess at the stress he must feel. Nothing and no one has prepared him for how to act in such a situation.

Yet no preparation is needed. Pinocchio knows instinctively what to do. We see a being that, in the face of danger, fights or flees without needing to think. Humans and animals can adapt instantly to threats. In psychology this is called the "fight-or-flight" reaction. We owe it to our central nervous system.

This is what sets humans and animals apart from plants, which communicate by chemical messengers, a process that takes more time. Pinocchio's behavior shows that he has now moved beyond the purely vegetative realm, unlike a few days

earlier, when he failed to notice his own feet burning away.



We humans too can rely blindly on fight-or-flight. In an instant, our ability to take in and process information expands. The pupils widen to let in more light. The heart quickens its pace. The hairs on our body stand on end, making us more sensitive to vibrations.

But this can also become a problem. Imagine that the white blackbird from the previous chapter had escaped the cat's jaws. Very likely it would soon have perched on a branch again and begun to sing. A blackbird lives first and foremost in the here and now ("I feel like singing"), not in the past ("if only I had kept quiet") or in the future ("where might the cat be hiding next?").

By contrast, we humans can linger in the past or the future with our thoughts. And that's where the trouble begins: we can worry for long stretches of time. In doing so, we put ourselves into a constant state of fight-or-flight, with all its harmful effects on our health.

Yet the very ability to reflect can also release us from this cycle. By thinking things through, we can make a conscious choice about what our next step will be. Our behavior then is

no longer an impulsive reaction but a deliberate response. We might, for example, choose to negotiate with our attackers or hand over our gold at once. For what is sudden wealth compared with one's own life? Of course we might still decide to fight or to flee, but in that case we act consciously, having at least briefly weighed our options.

Does Pinocchio already have the ability to step beyond fight-or-flight, as we humans can? So far there is no sign of such consciousness. We are approaching a turning point, one that Pinocchio now urgently needs.