



Helping Early Literacy with Practice Strategies

**The Helping Early Literacy with
Practice Strategies (HELPS)
Curriculum: Instructional Passages
Developed for Use with the
HELPS Program**

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**The
HELPS
Curriculum**

Student Passages

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Games that April Likes

April likes to play. She likes to play in the mud, climb trees, and build things. These are things that many boys like also. But April knows she is not a boy. In fact, she loves being a girl! She loves to play dress-up, loves her cute teddy bears, and likes to play with her long hair. When she plays with her hair, she can make it look really pretty.

But there are some games that April will not play with other girls. April does not like to play with dolls, pick pretty flowers, or play with tea sets. There are also games that April does not like to play with boys. For example, she does not like to wrestle or play with toy guns. The games that April loves the most are tag and hide-and-seek. In these games, many boys and girls can play together and all have fun. April likes games the most when all kids can play together.

Boating at the Lake

This summer, Dad is taking me to the lake for our summer vacation. I have never been to the lake before and I have never been on a boat. Mom says it will be a lot of fun, but that we need to be safe. She bought me a bright orange safety vest to wear on the boat. It is just my size.

Dad said we will be staying right near the dock. Because of this, we can use the boat just like we would use a car. We can take the boat to get gas, to shop at a store, or to go to a restaurant. Dad said there are other fun things that we can do with the boat. We can go very fast and pull people on skis behind the boat. Or, we can pull people who lay on an inner tube. Dad calls this “tubing.” Dad said I could go tubing, but I am still too small to water ski. I think this will be the best summer vacation ever.

Candy Store

My dad said that I did such a good job in school that I could go to the candy store. The next day, we went to the candy store.

I had never seen so much candy in one place. Lots of kids were at the candy store with their parents. First, I looked at all the chocolates. Dad said chocolates are the best, but Mom said he wasn't allowed to eat them. I chose three different types of chocolates and put them into a bag. There were chocolates with coconut, dark chocolate, and chocolates with sprinkles on them. I wanted to eat them right away but Dad told me to wait until after dinner.

Then we walked over to the hard candy. I picked out watermelon candy and bubble gum. My dad said that if I keep doing well in school, we can come back to the candy store.

Yard Sale

Today my family is having a yard sale. At first, I thought a yard sale meant that people were going to buy our front yard. I was sad about this because I like to play with my friends in the front yard. But my mom later told me that a yard sale means we are going to sell things we don't use anymore. She said we will put these things on tables in our front yard. Then, people from our neighborhood will look at them and possibly buy some of these things.

Mom and Dad put a lot of old stuff on the tables. They set out clothes I have outgrown and a lot of old shoes and dresses that Mom never wears anymore. My dad said that he wears most of his old clothes. Dad only put three old shirts on the tables.

I decided to sell some of my old toys. My mom said I could keep the money we get from those toys. My older sister did not try to sell any of her old things. She said she would rather donate these things to charity. Mom said we will also donate things we do not sell at our yard sale.

Sharing

We have new neighbors. Mom and Dad said that my brother, Tim, and I should go over and play with the little boy and girl. Yesterday we went over to play with them, but they were not very nice. Nicole wouldn't let me play with her dolls. She wouldn't even let me read one of her books. Her brother, Ben, said Tim couldn't play with his cars. But Ben was not even playing with his cars.

When we told Mom and Dad, they said that we should invite Ben and Nicole over to our house and share our toys with them. Mom said that maybe Nicole and Ben never had neighbors before and maybe they didn't know how to share. They said that we should show them how much fun sharing and playing together can be.

Tim and I played with our new neighbors and we shared our toys like Mom and Dad suggested. We all had a lot of fun that day. And, the next time we played with Nicole and Ben at their house, they shared with us just like we did at our house.

Starting a Bug Collection

My friend Kevin came over to play today. It was a sunny day and Mom told us to go outside to play. We walked outside to the front lawn. We sat down in the grass. Then a lady bug and some ants crawled on Kevin's leg.

We looked at the ground and saw lots of bugs. There were black bugs and red bugs. There were big bugs and small bugs. I even found bugs that make Mom scream when she sees them.

Kevin said we should start a bug collection. We asked Mom if we could use some of her glass jars to hold the bugs. The jars have lids to keep things sealed inside of them. Mom said we could use them.

Kevin and I got two jars and then we walked around the yard all day to find bugs. At the end of the day, Mom said I could take the bugs we found into my class for show and tell. I was the first in my class to have a bug collection.

Cooking with Mom

After we got back from the restaurant, I told my mom I wanted to learn how to cook. The next day, she let me cook dinner with her. She cut up all the vegetables and she let me stir the pot of soup. She said it was a very important job to make sure the vegetables were stirred well.

After she finished making the meatloaf, she let me put it in the oven. I used oven mitts so I wouldn't burn my hands. After a while, she said it was time to take the meatloaf out of the oven. Very carefully, I helped with that, too.

When Dad came home from work and we all sat at the dinner table, Mom told him how I helped with a lot of the cooking. When Dad took his first bite of meatloaf, he said it was fantastic. Dad said I should continue learning how to cook and practicing with Mom. He said that if I keep learning and practicing, I could be a chef one day.

The Baby Bird

Today I found a baby bird in the yard. It was all alone and chirping, but it got quiet when I came near. The baby bird could not fly, so I picked it up and took the bird in the house to show Mother.

Mother said that we would have to help the baby bird. She said that mother birds do not like the way people smell and that we could not put the baby back in the nest. This is because the mother bird would think the baby smelled like people now. Then, Mother called the vet to ask how we could help the baby bird.

The vet told Mother that baby birds are difficult to care for and that we should take him to the wildlife reserve. The vet said a baby bird needs to eat every ten minutes, all day long. We put some paper towels in the bottom of a box and cut holes in the top to make a warm place for the bird. Then we drove the baby bird to the reserve. He was only our baby bird for one hour, but he was still our baby bird.

Bedtime Stories

Sometimes at night, my sister and I like to stay up and tell each other scary stories. We hide under the blankets with flashlights and whisper so Mother does not hear. Mother does not like it when we stay up past our bed time.

My sister and I use the flashlight to make shadows on our faces. The shadows make us look like monsters! Then we tell stories about ghosts, vampires, and monsters. When the stories are really scary, we sit right next to each other and hold hands.

Sometimes Mother catches my sister and me telling stories. Even though we try to be very, very quiet, sometimes the stories will be very scary. If the story is really scary, one of us will scream. When Mother hears us, we are caught! She comes in our room, takes our flashlight, and says to us, "Okay, girls, lights out." When we are really scared from the stories, Mother sits in the room with us until we fall asleep.

Sleep

My new baby brother likes to sleep. He does not want to play. He only wants to sleep. He only wakes up to eat. Then he goes right back to sleep. He sleeps a lot!

In school I learned that a brown bat likes to sleep more than a baby. A brown bat sleeps about twenty hours each day. I also learned that bears sleep the whole winter. I learned that tigers sleep sixteen hours each day. I think this is about how much my baby brother sleeps. Cats sleep twelve hours each day. They like to sleep, too.

I sleep about nine hours every day. I have to sleep so I am not tired in school. But some animals do not need to sleep very much. Cows sleep four hours each day. Horses only sleep three hours each day. My mom says that she *never* gets to sleep, but I know she is just joking with me.

Chased By a Dog

One day Angela did not finish her lunch at school. She took her lunch home in her lunch box. When she got off the school bus, she started to walk home. Then she saw a dog down the street. The bus was gone. She was all alone on the street with the dog. She was scared. But she remembered that her dad once said: “Never run when you see a dog. If you run, the dog will chase you. If you look brave, the dog will leave you alone.”

Angela tried very hard to not show fear. When she passed by the dog, the dog jumped on her! He was wagging his tail.

Angela screamed and dropped her lunch box. All her lunch fell out. The dog began to eat her lunch as Angela ran home crying.

At home, Angela remembered something else her dad said, “If a dog wags his tail, he is nice and does not want to hurt you.”

But Angela thought to herself, “This dog ate my lunch. I don’t think that is very nice.”

An Afternoon Walk

Michelle loves to take walks with Grandma and Grandpa. She learns something new every time.

On their walk today, Molly greeted Michelle, Grandma, and Grandpa. Molly is the small, white dog that lives next door. Every time Molly sees Michelle, she barks and wags her tail. Molly will lick Michelle's hand, too.

Today, Michelle got to run with Molly for a little while. Michelle learned that Molly really likes to run. They had so much fun running together.

Then Michelle got to see birds in the neighborhood. The birds like to sing pretty songs. Michelle and Grandma cannot sing like the birds, so they listened together. But Grandpa did not only listen. Grandpa talked to the birds! Until today, Michelle did not know that Grandpa can talk to birds. Every time Grandpa whistled, Michelle heard the birds talk back. Then, Grandpa whistled a pretty song. Soon, all the birds in the trees around them were singing pretty songs.

Michelle loves to take walks with Grandma and Grandpa. There is so much to learn on every walk.

Fireflies

It was a quiet, summer day. Deer and her three daughters played in the forest. Then, one by one, her daughters started to scream.

Deer ran to them. She saw what was scaring them. There were small, black bugs. They crawled on the trees.

“They are only fireflies,” said Deer.

“I do not like them,” said one of her daughters. “They are ugly!”

“That is a mean thing to say,” said Deer. “There are pretty things about fireflies. There are pretty things about all creatures.”

Deer’s daughter stood and pouted.

“Just wait,” said Deer, “you will see how beautiful fireflies can be.”

Soon, night came. The forest was very dark. The daughters then saw four yellow lights in the air. They looked like tiny, floating stars.

One daughter yelled, “Wow! They are so pretty!” Just as she said that, more yellow lights appeared before them.

“You see,” said Deer, “Those pretty lights are from the fireflies. Sometimes, it just takes time to see each creature’s beauty.”

Flowers

Mom looked at her garden. She said we should go buy some more flowers. She said I could help her plant them.

We went to the store to buy flowers. Mom said I could pick out colorful flowers for the garden. I saw so many pretty flowers. It was hard to choose.

I liked the big yellow ones, but Mom said we should get something smaller. She liked the pink ones, but I didn't like the color pink. Then we saw the small, purple flowers. We both liked the purple flowers a lot. Mom asked the manager to get them for us so we could take them home.

For the next month, I helped Mom water the flowers. Some of them grew really fast. I was happy to work with my mom in the garden. Dad said, because I did such a good job with Mom in the garden, maybe I could help him mow the lawn.

Camping Trip

Today, when I got off of the bus, I ran as fast as I could. Today I am going camping with my family. When I got to my house, my mother and father were putting everything in the van. Father said I could be in charge of the checklist.

“Tents?” I asked.

“Check,” said Father.

“Sleeping bags?” I asked.

“Check,” said Father.

“Food?” I asked.

“Check. We are ready to go!” said Father.

The whole family got into the van and we drove for three hours. We sang songs and Father made us laugh by telling silly jokes. I also talked with my brother, Eric. Eric and I were both excited!

When we arrived at the camp site, we pulled everything out of the van. Father said I could help set up the tent. Mother and Eric organized the food and made sandwiches for everyone. When each of us finished our job, we ate lunch and talked about going to the beach. We could walk to the beach from our tent. This was already such a great camping trip and we had hardly begun all the fun.

Go-Karts

Every Saturday my dad takes my brother and me to the Fun Park near our house. Sometimes Mom comes with us, but not every time.

At the Fun Park, they have bumper boats, video games, batting cages, and go-karts. We all love the go-karts the most.

The first time we went go-kart riding, Dad told us how much fun it would be. But my brother and I were scared because we had never driven one before. Dad was a very good teacher.

First, he told us to put on our seat-belts and helmets. Then he showed us how to use the gas and the brakes. He said that we should use the brake just before a turn and use the gas while we turn and when the path is straight. He said these tricks will help to keep us on the go-kart racetrack.

Dad said, "Once you know these tricks, all you need to do is practice."

Now, this is what we do every Saturday.

Great-Grandma's Christmas Cookies

Nana is what I call my great-grandmother. She is eighty-seven years old and makes the best Christmas cookies ever. They are crispy cookies that are shaped like bells, stars, or Christmas trees. She puts pink, green, and yellow icing on them. The icing tastes like lemon. Every year we go to visit Nana. Each year she sends me home with a bag full of cookies. This year, Nana said that I am old enough to help her with the cookies.

On Christmas morning, Mom and I got up early and went to visit Nana. Nana showed me how to make the cookie batter and let me run the big mixer. Then she rolled out the dough and I got to cut out the cookies. Nana put them in the oven, and when they were done, she iced them while I sprinkled them.

When everyone came over for dinner that night they said the cookies were wonderful, just like every year. I guess that means I did a good job. Maybe one day I will be as good as Nana at baking Christmas cookies.

Chinese New Year

Today is Chinese New Year. My parents will give me a red envelope. Inside the red envelope, there will be money. My sister will get one, too. On Chinese New Year, adults usually give money to the kids in their family.

Today I also get to help mom cook. Mom will cook the whole day. I love making New Year's cake with her. Mom will pour rice flour and sugar in a big bowl. Then I will get to mix it with water. My sister usually steams the cake.

I like to help Dad, too. We will hang red paper that has gold, Chinese writing. It will go on the doors and walls.

Red is a sign of good luck. Even the New Year's candy has red and gold wrapping. I will put the candy on a plate. There will also be watermelon seeds, fruits that taste like candy, nuts, and other dried sweets on the plate.

I also love Chinese New Year because I get to see my cousins, uncles, and aunts. They will be coming over for dinner. We will all celebrate together.

My Bunny

I have a bunny. My bunny lives in my yard. He is so cute and soft. He has white fur. He has happy, red eyes. He is always so happy to see me. My bunny is smart. When I call his name he hops to me. Then he licks my hand. Sometimes he licks my toes, too. My bunny is so sweet.

My bunny is nice. He is a good friend. One time my bunny fought a crow to protect his friend, the turtle. I saw it with my own eyes. The crow wanted to eat the turtle's eggs. The turtle just laid the eggs that day. So my bunny growled and jumped at the crow. That scared the crow away. I was so proud of my bunny for being so brave. He is such a good friend to me and the turtle. I love my bunny!

Helping Out

Saturday morning is the morning that I like the least. That is when my older sister and I have to clean. Mom says that she needs our help around the house. Even though we do not like cleaning very much, Erin and I do not mind. Our mom is a single parent and we know how busy she is.

Every day, before Mom goes to work, she gets up early to take Erin and me to school. Every night, when Mom gets off of work, she has to pick us up from our after-school program. Then she has to take us home, make dinner, help with our homework, and clean the house all by herself. Our mom is a super mom!

So every Saturday morning Erin and I clean our rooms and our bathroom. We sweep and mop the floors in the kitchen. When everything is done, Mom takes us out for ice cream and tells us that she appreciates our help. Even though Saturday mornings are not a lot of fun, Saturday nights are the best. We get to spend them having fun with Mom.

Homemade Ice Cream

Earlier today my friends came over to play and I asked Mom if we could do something new and fun. Mom said that we should make ice cream. When I asked her how we would do that without an ice cream maker, Mom said that she knew a way.

When all my friends arrived, she took us into the kitchen. There was milk, sugar, ice, salt, plastic bags, and many kinds of candy, cookies, and nuts. Mom helped each of us mix together the ingredients that we wanted. I made cookies and cream with vanilla and chocolate cookies. My friend, Gavin, put all the ingredients together. He called this the Superstar!

After we mixed our ingredients, we put the mix in a small bag and closed it. Then we put that bag inside a larger bag that contained a lot of ice and salt. We shook the bags for five minutes. We each made our very own ice cream and got just the flavor that we wanted.

Taking Care of Plants

To take care of plants, many things are needed. One thing plants need is water so that they can grow. But too much water or too little water could kill the plant. Plants also need the sun. When plants are in the dark they could die. Thus, plants need the right amount of water and sun to live.

When a plant grows, it may have flowers on it. The plant is healthy if a bird or a bee lands on its flowers. If the plant is sick, the leaves will turn colors. The leaves can turn from green to yellow, and then they will fall off the plant. Worse, if the plant is really sick, it can turn brown and then turn black. If your plant is green and there are many holes in it, then there could be a caterpillar near the plant. A caterpillar is like a small, green worm. He will not hurt people, but he must be removed from the plant before he eats all of the leaves.

Explorers

One day, on the weekend, my friend and I pretended to be explorers. We went into the woods behind my house and brought a pen and paper to make a map.

“My dad said a good map always has landmarks,” I said.

“What is a landmark?” asked David.

“It is something that makes it easy to know where you are, like a big rock or a funny shaped hill,” I explained. We looked around and saw the biggest tree in the woods.

“We’ll put the big tree on our map,” I said.

“Let’s go find something cool to hide so we can make this map a treasure map,” said David.

“Great idea,” I replied. “We’ll see if your sister Janelle can find the treasure.”

We decided to hide candy in a spot next to the big tree. We drew a big X on the map showing exactly where the treasure was.

“I cannot wait to see if Janelle finds it,” I said. “With our map, I bet she will find it easily.”

First Airplane Ride

Gloria is moving to another country. It is far away, so Gloria and her parents will have to ride an airplane to get there. Gloria has never been on a plane. She is excited!

Gloria said to her mother, "When I am on the plane, I am going to fly in the sky like a bird!"

Gloria's mom and dad packed their things. They could not fit all of their things on the airplane, so they left some things behind with their friends and family. Gloria took the toy she loved the most. Gloria's mom brought family pictures.

When Gloria got on the plane, she started to cry a little. She was a little scared and said to her father, "I do not want to fall out of the plane. Mom said if the windows open, then we will all fall out."

Gloria's father smiled. He replied, "Your mom was only joking with you. We will not fall out." He pushed on the window. It did not move. "See, we will not fall out."

Gloria pushed also. Her father was right. They were safe. They were about to fly in the clouds. Gloria was excited again!

My Birthday

Yesterday was a great day because it was my birthday. I turned nine. When I woke up and walked downstairs, I saw a present on the large kitchen chair. There was also a cake upon the table.

“Happy Birthday!” my parents shouted.

In the afternoon, my mom lit the birthday candles and my parents sang the Happy Birthday song.

“Make a wish!” my mom said.

I blew out the candles on my cake and I wished for a pet dog. But I didn’t tell anyone, because I still want the wish to come true. Next, I opened the present on the table.

“A baseball glove!” I shouted with excitement. “Thank you, Mom and Dad!”

“You are welcome,” my dad said. “Let’s make sure you break it in before the season begins this spring. “Maybe later we can play catch and you can try it out.”

Later that day, Dad and I played catch in the backyard. My new glove fit perfectly. It was a terrific birthday. I wish it was my birthday every day.

Grandma's House

I go to Grandma's house about five times each year. I love going to Grandma's house. When we got to her house last weekend she said, "You are so big! Did you grow a foot?"

"No Grandma," I said. "I have two feet." She laughed really hard and we walked into her house. She made me chicken-pot-pie. After I finished I felt so full.

"Get ready for dessert because I also made apple pie," Grandma said.

I guess I wasn't too full because I ate that, too.

The next day Grandma took me to the park. She threw the frisbee with me. After a little while Grandma wanted to sit down.

"I know what we can do," I said. "Let's play *I spy*."

"That's a great idea!" said Grandma.

After we finished playing *I spy*, we went back to Grandma's house. The next day I said goodbye to Grandma and went home with Mom. I felt sad. But Grandma said we would have even more fun next time.

The Zoo

My class is going on a trip to the zoo next week. Mom says I must be very excited because I have been talking about this trip for two weeks. She is right. I am very excited!

At the zoo, there are all kinds of animals to see and learn about. Giraffes have long legs and very long necks. They can run 35 miles per hour. Chimpanzees use sticks to get ants out of their ant nests. Then they eat the ants. Cheetahs can run 70 miles per hour. That is faster than the giraffes and faster than all other animals. Sea lions can bark and roar. They eat up to 15 pounds of food some days and nothing at all on other days.

Next week, at the zoo, I will get to learn even more about animals. I will probably even see animals I have never seen before.

The Butterfly

Last spring, I found a little green cocoon in my backyard. It was hanging under a leaf in one of our trees. When I found it, I did not know what it was. I ran into the house to get Mom and ask her what I found. This is when Mom told me that I found a cocoon. We looked at it very carefully together. Then Mom explained the cocoon to me.

Mom said that butterflies start as caterpillars. She said that when caterpillars are ready to change they make a cocoon. Mom said the caterpillar would stay in the cocoon for about two weeks. By the time the butterfly is ready to come out, we would be able to see through the cocoon. I was so excited to watch this fascinating process.

I decided that I would watch the cocoon every day until the butterfly came out. Two weeks later, I came home and the cocoon was empty. However, there was a beautiful, orange butterfly flying in our garden. This must have been the butterfly from the cocoon I found.

To Be an Ant

Tom was sad. His teacher gave him a lot of homework! That night, as Tom worked on his homework, he saw an ant on his desk.

“I wish I could be an ant,” thought Tom. “Then I would not have to work or go to school.”

All of a sudden, Tom was in a field with many ants. He was an ant, too. In front of him was a tiny crumb from a piece of cake. But to Tom, this looked like a big piece of cake. Tom knew he had to carry this home. But how? He would be squished!

But he carried it, and followed the line of ants all the way home. The walk home was very long and the cake on his back was heavy. When Tom got home with the other ants he was sent out to do hard work again.

Tom shouted, “I want to be a human! I have to go to school and do work, but I can also play video games. Ants never have fun.” Then Tom woke up. He stared at the piece of cake on his desk. He was not an ant. It was all a dream.

The Insect Night Light

Last night, Dad and I were in the yard just as it was getting dark. All of a sudden, I saw a flash of light. Then there was another flash, and another. Soon, there were little dots of light everywhere.

When I asked Dad what they were, he said they were lightning bugs. I had never seen glowing bugs before. I wanted to hold one.

As I ran around the yard trying to catch a lightning bug, Dad went into the house. When he came back, he had a glass jar with a lid. The lid had holes punched in it. Dad said, "Let's make your very own night light."

Dad and I put grass and a tiny bit of water in the bottom of the jar. Every time I caught a bug, Dad would put it in the jar. I caught twelve bugs. That night, I had my very own insect night light.

Making a Snowman

This morning, when I woke up, it was snowing. It had been snowing all night. The ground was white, the roads were white, and even the trees were white. I was so excited. I wanted to go out and play.

First, Mom made me dress in lots of warm clothes. I put on my snowsuit, coat, hat, boots, and mittens. After I was dressed warmly, I ran outside.

I made snow angels by lying in the snow and waving my arms and legs from side to side. Then I decided to make a snowman. Dad said he would help me.

Dad showed me how to roll a tiny snowball into a really big one. Then we made two more big snowballs, but they were a little smaller than the first one. Dad helped me put the smaller snowballs on top of the biggest one.

Next, Dad and I found two tree branches. We used these as arms for the snowman. Last, we found nine rocks. We used these to make eyes, a nose, and a mouth. When we finished, Dad said this was the best looking snowman he ever saw.

Going to Work with Dad

Joseph was so excited when he woke up this morning. He was going to work with his dad.

“Are you ready to come to work with me, Joseph?” his dad asked.

“You bet!” said Joseph. Joseph had a huge grin on his face.

When Joseph and his dad walked in to Dad’s office, Joseph met a lot of people. These were the people his dad worked with every day. Everyone was really nice to Joseph. Some of them even gave Joseph candy.

“Don’t let the candy spoil your dinner, Joseph,” said his dad.

“I won’t, Dad. I’ll save most of it for later.”

During the day, Joseph helped his dad with work. He helped his dad put away files. He also helped to clean his dad’s desk. When Joseph finished, his dad said, “Thanks, Joseph, you are a great helper.”

“Thanks Dad,” said Joseph. He felt proud about helping his dad. Joseph thought that he might like to work in an office someday, too.

Planting Flowers

Yesterday, I was in the yard with Mother. We planted flowers. The flowers were pink, blue, and purple. They were very pretty.

Mother let me pick the spots in the garden where we should plant the flowers. Then she helped me dig the holes. She said the holes had to be just right so that the flowers could get enough sun and water. She said they could not be too close together. If they are too close the flowers will not grow.

After we dug all the holes, Mother and I put the flowers inside the holes. Mother showed me how to push the dirt down around the flowers to make sure they would stay in place. Then I pushed the dirt over the flowers. Mother said I did this perfectly.

After we planted all the flowers, we watered them carefully. Mother and I made a beautiful garden yesterday. I can't wait to watch our flowers grow.

How to Make Cookies

I love sugar cookies! They are so good! I know how to make them, too.

First, I ask Mom or Dad to turn on the oven. Then I warm a cup of butter. Next, I pour the butter and one cup of sugar into a large bowl. After that, I crack an egg and put the egg in the bowl. I try not to put the egg shell in the bowl.

Then, I add a little bit of vanilla and salt. Last, I add three cups of flour and some baking powder into the bowl. I mix everything until it is all even.

With help from Mom or Dad, I put the cookies into the oven. I like to turn on the oven light to watch them bake.

After about 10 minutes, the cookies are done. I wait 10 more minutes because the cookies need to cool. Once the cookies have cooled, I share them with people I love. I also save one for myself.

Baking cookies makes me happy. I like to share cookies with others because I want them to be happy, too.

The Bookstore

“Who wants to go to the bookstore?” Bryan’s dad asked.

“I do,” Bryan’s sister shouted.

“I’m playing video games,” Bryan said.

“Well take a break, Bryan,” Dad said. “When we come back you can play more video games if you want to.”

“But I won’t find anything fun to read,” Bryan whined. “I’ve already read everything in my classroom.”

“Well it’s a big store,” Dad said. “I’m confident we shall find something new and fun to read.”

Bryan agreed to go, but he still didn’t think he’d find a fun book to read.

When they got to the store, Bryan still didn’t think he would find something he liked. But after a couple minutes, Dad said, “Look at those books about insects.”

“Whoa!” Bryan said. “Those *are* cool!” Bryan picked up a book and began to read. “We don’t have *this* book in my class.”

Next, Bryan saw a fun book about an eleven-year-old pirate. “Wow,” Bryan said. “I didn’t know there were so many fun books.”

Dad bought two books for Bryan and two for his sister.

When they got home, Dad asked Bryan if he still wanted to play video games.

“I think I’ll finish these books first,” Bryan said, quietly.

My New Kitten

My new kitten's name is Squirrel. I just picked her out from the animal shelter yesterday. Squirrel was the best kitten there.

She has gray hair and pale green eyes. Her eyes are the only thing about her that isn't gray. Even her nose is gray. I knew she was the kitten for me because she didn't run and hide from me like the other cats did. Also, she did not try to scratch me. Squirrel just walked right over to me, rubbed against my hand, and started to purr.

When we got home, Mom said that because the new kitten was mine, I could name her. I told mom that my new kitten's name would be Squirrel. Mom looked surprised. I told her that this was the best name because my kitten was gray and had a big fluffy tail. Mom agreed that my new kitten looks a little like a squirrel.

Sisters

The sisters are fighting again.

“You need to listen to me,” yelled Crystal. “I am older!”

“You are just two years older than me,” Stephanie yelled back. “You can’t tell me what to do.”

“Fine, I will not play with you,” said Crystal, going to her room.

“Fine,” Stephanie said, “I will play with my friends outside.”

Later that day, when running with her friends, Stephanie fell on the sidewalk. She hurt her knee. She was bleeding.

Stephanie cried, “Waaahh! It hurts!”

When Stephanie was crying, her friends did not know what to do. Soon, they left. They went off to play without her.

From the window, Crystal saw her little sister crying. Crystal ran out to help Stephanie and carried her home. Then Crystal cleaned and bandaged Stephanie’s knee.

“Sister,” Stephanie said to Crystal, “you are my best friend. I am sorry I yelled at you.”

Crystal smiled, “I am sorry too. Now let’s go back to playing our game.” Now, the sisters were laughing and playing together again.

The State Fair

Yesterday, we went to the State Fair. My mom and dad took me and my three sisters to the fairgrounds. When Dad bought the tickets, we walked through the gates and saw so many rides.

“What do you want to do first?” my dad asked us.

“I want to ride the roller coaster!” said Alyssa.

“I want to throw darts,” said Kathy.

“I want to pet the animals,” said Miranda.

“I want to eat a funnel cake,” I said. Then Dad made the face he makes when he pays the bills.

“Okay,” said my mom. “Dad will take Alyssa and Kathy to the rides while Jessica and Miranda come with me.”

So Miranda and I went with Mom. First we went to the petting zoo. We pet a lot of cool animals, such as cows, pigs, and even a pony. We also saw ducks, chickens, and a sheep. After petting the animals, Mom made us wash our hands. Next, we bought some food. I got my funnel cake and Miranda ate fried banana bread.

I can't wait to go to the State Fair again next year.

Playing Baseball

Baseball is a great sport. I joined little league this year. My team is called the Lions. I play short stop.

When I first started playing, I was not very good. Most of the other players were better than I was. The other players had been playing and practicing for a long time. I wanted to be as good as they were. I wanted to hit like our best hitter. I wanted to throw like our best pitcher. I wanted to catch like our best outfielder. Every time we had a game, I tried to be the best at everything.

Pretty soon, I learned that I could not do everything the very best. I realized that each person on the team was better than others at some things.

I learned that Anna is our best batter. I learned that Carlos is our best pitcher. I learned that I am our best short stop. When our team works together, and we do what we do best, we win a lot of games. This is why baseball is a great *team* sport.

A Storm Is Coming

Sam heard the news today. A big, mean storm is coming. “I have to protect my house from the wind and rain,” thought Sam.

Sam went right to work. First, he boarded the windows in his house. Sam did this in case the windows break during the storm. With them boarded, the glass will not cut him.

Then he filled up big buckets with drinking water, just in case the storm kept people from getting drinking water for a few days.

Next, Sam went to the grocery store to buy food. “Once the storm hits, all the stores will be closed,” thought Sam.

Sam then took out some candles and a lighter. “I will only light these candles if the power goes out,” said Sam to himself.

Lastly, he made a kit. The kit was filled with all his important papers, money, and keys. “If the storm attacks my house,” thought Sam, “I can be sure to have all my important things with me in this kit.”

Now, Sam felt ready for the big, mean storm.

The Animal Shelter

Jose is getting a pet cat today. Aunt Carolina is going to take him to the animal shelter to get a new cat.

“Is the animal shelter where we can get animals for free?” Jose asked his aunt.

“Yes,” said Aunt Carolina. “Do you know other things about animals in the shelter?”

“Yes!” said Jose, with a big smile on his face. “I know that these animals need a lot of love and attention, just like animals that live in a person’s home.”

“Why is that?” asked Aunt Carolina.

“It is because most animals at the shelter do not get a lot of attention. They do not have a person to pet them and play with them each day,” said Jose. “Usually, an animal that lives in a home has someone to give it a lot of attention.”

Jose added, “I am going to give my new kitty a lot of attention. I am going to play with her, pet her, feed her, and sleep next to her.”

“Wow!” exclaimed Aunt Carolina, smiling. “You are ready to have a pet. Let’s go to the shelter.”

Cleaning My Room

“You can’t go outside until you clean your room,” Father shouted from the living room.

“Awwwww, why?” Robert moaned from his bedroom. “I like leaving my clothes on the floor,” Robert said, looking at the mess in his room. “I also like when my toys are on the floor. I can find everything much easier when they are not put away.”

“You can’t go outside until you clean your room,” Father repeated, again shouting from the living room.

“How about I just push everything into one corner,” Robert replied. “Then you can see the floor. That will make it look clean.” But Robert knew this is not what his father meant by cleaning his room.

Robert waited for his father to reply. He heard nothing.

“How about I just put away my shirts?” Robert petitioned. Again, he heard nothing.

Robert thought for ten more minutes about how he could get out of cleaning his room.

Finally, it struck him. He realized he was not going to get out of cleaning his room. So Robert cleaned his room like Father asked, and then went outside to enjoy the day with his friends.

Being Scared

I was playing outside with my friend Jenna when, all of a sudden, we heard loud thunder. I screamed because I am afraid of storms. Immediately, Jenna and I ran inside my house so we would not get wet from the rain.

“Why did you scream?” Jenna asked me when we got into my bedroom.

“Because I think thunder and lightning are a little scary. Thunder is really loud, and lightning is scary to me because I once saw a tree that had been split in half by lightning.”

“It’s okay to be scared,” Jenna told me. “I’m most afraid of spiders.”

“Really?” I asked.

“Yes,” she giggled. “I usually scream when I see a spider.”

Just then, my dad walked into the room. He heard us talking. “Are you girls okay?”

“Yes,” Jenna and I said simultaneously.

“We were talking about things that scare us.”

“I heard,” my dad said. He chuckled a little. “Almost everyone has fears. That is very normal. But most of the time, the things people are afraid of never really hurt them.”

Taking Care of Mama

Mama was sick today. She said that her head hurt and that she was cold. In the morning, she fell asleep on the sofa.

Sterling tried to take care of Mama. Sterling ran to his room and pulled the blanket from his bed. It was heavy!

“If Mama is sleeping, she will need a blanket to keep her warm,” Sterling thought.

Sterling pulled the heavy blanket from his bed. He pulled as hard as he could.

Soon, Sterling got the blanket into the living room. Mama was still asleep. Sterling put the blanket over her. Then he touched her forehead. It was hot.

Sterling knew he should call Papa. “Papa,” Sterling said, “Mama’s head is very hot. She has been sick all day.”

“She must have a fever,” said Papa. “I will be home soon.”

When Papa came home, Mama was already awake.

“I feel much better,” said Mama to Papa. She was smiling. She looked at Sterling and said, “Thank you for taking care of me so well. Because of you, I feel much better!”

Soccer Game

“I’m bored,” I told my mom. “There is nothing to do today.”
“Why don’t you call your friends and start a soccer game?”
my mom asked.

“That’s a great idea!” I said. I picked up the telephone and called some friends. Tony and Suzanne were at summer camp. Next, I called Maria.

When Maria’s mom picked up the phone, I said, “Hi, Mrs. Gonzalez, can Maria and Myra play today?” Maria and Myra are twin sisters.

“Sure,” Mrs. Gonzalez said. “Let me put Myra on the phone.”

“Hello?” asked Myra.

“Hi Myra,” I said. “Do you want to play soccer today?”

“That sounds like fun,” said Myra. “Maria will want to play, too. She will help us get more kids to play.”

The three of us called all of our friends or walked to their houses. We found ten kids on the block to play soccer. We had two teams with five kids each.

We played at the park across from my house. We played for almost three hours. Toward the end of the game, my mom came outside and asked, “Who wants juice and watermelon?”

“We do!” we all shouted.

My mom had some great ideas today.

Fall Chores

Mother said that my sister and I had to rake the leaves today. She said this was our fall chore. Ashley and I did not want to rake the leaves. They made everything look pretty. The yard was covered in red, orange, and yellow. Still, Mother said we must rake them.

All afternoon, Ashley and I raked and raked. We got every single leaf into one huge pile of colorful leaves. The pile was almost as tall as we were. We were finally done!

Just as I started to walk to the house, I heard a huge thud. I turned around and Ashley was right in the middle of our huge pile of leaves. Leaves were flying everywhere. Ashley was laughing. She said, "Jump in. It's so much fun!"

I did, and we played in the leaves for almost two hours. Later that day, we had to rake them all over again. But it was so much fun to play in the pile of leaves. Even though we raked the leaves twice, it was worth it.

The Great Man

It was a hot summer day. Antonio and his two younger brothers were outside. But nobody else on their street was outside. It was too hot!

Antonio and his brothers played a card game. They played in the shade of a large oak tree on the front lawn. All of a sudden, they heard soft sounds of bells from far away. It was a little song. "It must be a fairy," said one of Antonio's brothers.

"No," said Antonio. "It is a very, very great man. He is so amazing that he can make all the kids on our block come outside, even when it is this hot outside."

His brothers looked at him. Their mouths were open with astonishment.

One brother asked, "Who is it, Antonio?"

The music became louder.

Antonio smiled and said, "Just wait, and you will see."

Then, a white truck appeared on the street. The great man was inside. It was the ice cream man! Just as Antonio said, this man made all the kids on the street run outside.

Aunt Jan's Surprise

Last Friday, I went to visit my cousin Marcus. His mother, Aunt Jan, said that she had a special surprise for us. First, we ordered pizza and Aunt Jan let us pick the toppings.

“Is this the surprise?” we asked.

“No,” Aunt Jan said.

After dinner, she brought us great big bowls of ice cream while we watched our favorite movie.

“Is this the surprise?” we asked.

“No,” Aunt Jan said.

When the movie was over, Aunt Jan went into the closet and pulled out a huge box of blankets, ropes, and pillows. “This is the surprise!” she said.

Marcus and I just looked at the box. It didn't seem like a very good surprise to us at all. What were we going to do with a box of blankets, pillows, and ropes?

But, Aunt Jan knew. She used the pillows to build walls. She used the ropes to hold things together. Then she hung blankets all around. When she was done, we had the best surprise ever. We had our very own fort.

Volunteer Work

My older brother, Chris, is going away this summer. Mom says that Chris is going away again to do volunteer work. Chris is a college student. He is twenty three. For the past few summers, Chris has gone away to do volunteer work.

Chris told me he is going to Guatemala this summer.

“Guatemala is a country in Central America,” he told me. “Most people in Guatemala speak Spanish.”

“What will you do in Guatemala?” I asked.

“I am going to live in a small city. Many people in this city are poor. They do not have the amount of food and medicine that we have. They do not have fancy schools like we have. While I’m there, I will help teachers in a school. Hopefully I will get to play with the children during recess, and I might even help build a new school!”

“The people there will really like you for helping them,” I said.

“Yes,” Chris continued, “but even though I will be there to help, the people in this city will also be helping *me*. I am going to learn so many new things this summer.”

Chocolate

There are three basic types of chocolate: dark chocolate, milk chocolate, and white chocolate. Dark chocolate is not as sweet as the others. But dark chocolate has the most cocoa powder. Some scientists say that cocoa powder is good for a person's heart.

Milk chocolate is dark chocolate with milk in it. Milk helps a person's bones grow big and strong.

White chocolate is not real chocolate. It has cocoa butter and does not have cocoa powder. Cocoa butter is the fat from ground up cocoa beans. There are two kinds of white chocolate. One type is made from sugar, milk, and vegetable oil. The other type is ivory in color. It is made of sugar, milk, and cocoa butter. Many say that this type of white chocolate tastes better than the chocolate made from vegetable oil.

People all over the world love the taste of chocolate. However, eating too much chocolate can be bad for a person's body. This is because eating too much sugar is bad for the body.

Oakland Park

Some days, my mom and dad take me to Oakland Park. They pack our lunch and we sit on a blanket in the grass at Oakland Park. We eat turkey sandwiches, strawberries, and pretzels. We drink berry-flavored juice from our juice-boxes. After lunch, Mom and Dad take me to the playground.

We usually play for a long time on the slides and swings. But I do not get tired at all. Later, Mom and Dad say, "Let's go ride the merry-go-round." Mom and Dad love the merry-go-round. I like it, too. But it's not my favorite thing in the park. My favorite thing is the train.

The train is always the last thing we ride before leaving Oakland Park. We sit in the front and ride through the park. We go under the covered bridge. Just before we get back to the little train station, the train conductor lets me pull the rope. The train screams, "Toot! Toot!" That is my favorite thing about Oakland Park.

Magician

Last year, my friend Jonathan had a magician at his birthday party. The magician did many tricks and he made everyone laugh. First, he pulled coins out of people's ears and pulled ten scarves out of his mouth. Then he did card tricks.

This year, when my mom asked me what kind of party I want to have for my birthday, I told her that I wanted a magician. I wanted a magician like Jonathan had at his party. I wanted a great magician who would come over to my house and do lots of tricks for all my friends. He should do all the tricks that Jonathan's magician did. He should also pull flowers out of thin air and pull rabbits out of hats. And, he should wear a purple suit with a cape and top hat. I think all magicians should dress that way.

Mom said she would see about getting a magician, but that not all magicians wear purple suits, capes, and top hats. She also said that not all magicians perform the same tricks. Even if the magician at my party dresses differently and performs different tricks, I know it will still be a lot of fun.

Camping at the Beach

Our family went to the beach yesterday. When we arrived, my brothers started to build the tent. I am too young to help, so Uncle Jim and I raced to the water. While we swam, Dad and Mom started a campfire and started to cook some food.

Soon my brothers joined Uncle Jim and I in the water. We swam, splashed water, and ran in the soft sand. Then we looked for little fishes by the big rocks. After we ate lunch, everyone played a game together. We played tag and I tagged everyone really fast—even my brothers.

As the sun went down, it was dinner time. I roasted two hot dogs and ate both of them. The whole family sat by the fire. Uncle Jim played his guitar and we sang songs. Later that night, Mom told us scary stories. I was not scared, though. I knew the stories were not real.

After the stories, warm in my sleeping bag, I fell asleep under the stars.

Elephants

Elephants are the largest animals that live on land. There are two kinds of elephants: African and Asian. African elephants are bigger in size and have larger ears than Asian elephants. When born, an elephant can weigh 265 pounds. Adult elephants eat 300 to 400 pounds of food every day!

Size is not the only interesting thing about elephants. Elephants have great memories. They can also play, laugh, and cry. Elephants touch their babies when the babies cry. They also have ways to say hello to other elephants, and they become sad when elephants in their family are lost.

Years ago, there were many, many elephants. Today, because there are so few elephants left, they are called an endangered species. This means that there are rules about hunting elephants. There are also rules about using elephants for work. These rules help to make sure that elephants do not become extinct.

Water Park

Last weekend, my mom took my friend Kwan and me to the water park. We left early in the morning and arrived at the water park before lunch. When Kwan and I looked around the park, we saw so many different water slides and two wave pools. The wave pools had machines that made waves for kids to play in.

“This is awesome!” said Kwan.

First, we went on the smallest waterslide. It was my first time sliding down a waterslide. It looked scary, but after I watched Kwan slide down, I knew it would be a lot of fun.

I walked up the stairs to the top of the slide. When the lifeguard said, “Go!” I sat in the slide and then swooshed down as the water carried me. I laughed and hollered as I went down and then splashed into the pool of water at the bottom.

“That was so much fun,” I said to Kwan. “Let’s go on a bigger one now.”

All day, Kwan and I rode the waterslides, played in the wave pools, and had so much fun together.

Our First Family Car

My family moved to the United States two years ago from Vietnam. Last week, Mom and Dad passed their driving test. Today, they are buying their very first car! I wonder, with excitement, what color it will be.

Finally, a shiny, green car pulls into the parking lot below our apartment. I wait eagerly at the window to see if it is Mom and Dad. It is them! They get out of the car, look up at me in the window, and smile. They wave for me and my brother to come down to see.

Dad says they bought the car from the used car lot next to the mall. Mom says it doesn't run well if the air conditioning is on, but other than that, it runs great. I think the car looks beautiful! My brother and I sit in the back seat and we agree it is really comfortable.

Now that we have a car, we no longer have to walk or take the bus to the grocery store. We no longer have to walk places in the rain or snow. And tonight, our family is finally going to the new pizza restaurant on the other side of town.

A Sleepover

Tonight I am spending the night at Mike's house. Mike is my cousin. He is also my best friend. We have so many things planned for tonight.

First, Aunt Joni will pick me up from my apartment. Then she is going to take Mike and me to McDonald's. Aunt Joni always spoils me, so I know I will order a milkshake! After that, she will take us to rent a video game and funny movies. Mike and I always agree on the video games we like. Mostly, we like the sports games. With sports games, we can play on the same team and play against the computer. This time we agreed to rent a football game.

When we get back to Mike's house, we will eat popcorn and ice cream while we watch one of our movies. After that, we will play our video game. Last time I stayed at Mike's house, we played video games all night. I had so much fun last time. This time will be just as much fun!

A Pet Penguin

A pet penguin was in the news today. His name is Flip. Flip goes food shopping every day. He waddles to the fish market all by himself. He wears a little penguin backpack. When he gets to the store, Flip tastes the fish to make sure it tastes good. When he nods his head, the owner of the store puts a fish into Flip's backpack. Then Flip takes the fish home to his family.

I asked Mom, "Can I *please* have a pet penguin?"

Mom asked me what I will need to take care of a penguin. I did not know, so I looked it up.

I read books in the library and looked on the internet at school. I found out that penguins like to live with other penguins. I also learned that a penguin will eat seven-hundred dollars worth of fish each year. That is a lot of money.

I don't think Mom will let me have a penguin. I am going to ask her for a kitten instead.

My Big Sister

When I grow up, I want to be just like my big sister. She is nine years older than I am and she just moved away to go to college. Most of my friends don't like their brothers and sisters, but I think it is because they do not have a sister like mine.

My sister is always making me laugh. Whenever I am having a bad day, she makes funny faces and tells jokes to cheer me up. And, even though I know everyone has bad days, my sister never acts like she is having a bad day. She is always smiling and laughing, even when she is busy or seems like she should be stressed.

The thing I like the most about my sister is that she is never mean to me. I know that some brothers and sisters can be mean to their siblings. But my sister never calls me names, picks on me, or gets me in trouble with Mom or Dad. Most importantly, we never get in fights. Even though my sister just moved to college, she still calls me on the phone and still makes me laugh.

School

A long time ago, many people throughout the world were forbidden to learn how to read and write. These people were not allowed to go to school. Even today, in some countries, many children are not allowed to go to school. And in some countries, all parents have to pay a lot of money for their children to go to school. In the United States, children and teenagers can go to school for free. This is true in many other countries also. Schools in the United States provide children with things like books, school buses, and computers. In other parts of the world, many schools do not have computers, textbooks, and other things that help children learn.

Children all over the world should get to go to school. Children who get to go to school learn how to read, write, draw, play musical instruments, and do many other things. They can use the things they learn to go to college, get a job, and maybe even teach other children someday.

My New Step-family

When my mom married Allen two years ago, I was so excited because our family was getting bigger. This meant I was going to have a new step-brother and I never had a brother before.

I didn't know, however, that living with a new step-family can sometimes be hard. When two families become one family, more people live in the same house and everyone needs to work together to get the chores done. There are also more people trying to use the bathroom at the same time and more people to cook for. This is also hard because not everyone likes to eat the same things.

But, the hardest thing with two new families becoming one is that everyone is used to something a little different at the start. For example, some people laugh when others do not, and some people know how to share when others do not. It took some time to get used to all the new people, but when I finally got used to my new step-family, everything became easier. Now we are all just one big family and I get along with everyone in my family—even my new brother!

Drum Lessons

I waited with excitement for my drum teacher to arrive. This was my first drum lesson. I sat in the waiting room and listened to the other students play. Each student played in a separate room along a long hallway. I could hear that some students were better than others. I guessed that the better students had been practicing longer and that I would sound more like the beginning students, at least during my first few months of lessons.

Mom and Dad told me that they would allow me to take drum lessons if I did well in school and helped with additional family chores. I agreed to this, of course, because I have wanted to take drum lessons since first grade.

When my drum teacher finally called my name, I was a little nervous. Mr. Steep told me he was excited to be my teacher and said we would start with some basics. He assured me that as a beginner, my music would not sound like drummers I hear on the radio. But, with practice for several months and years, I'd be good enough to be part of a band. This idea really excited me!

The Class Bully

Logan was the new student in William's class this year. William thought Logan was nice and very smart. However, Logan was shy, and being new to the school, Logan did not have any friends in the class.

William mostly felt sorry for Logan because of the way Seth treated him. Seth was the classroom bully. Seth picked on Logan almost every day, usually during lunch or recess when the teacher would not catch him.

William felt glad that Seth was not picking on him, but William always felt bad for Logan. William also felt bad because he never tried to help Logan. But one day, this changed.

During recess one Friday, William watched as Seth pushed Logan from the swing and took it from him. "Get lost, loser. This is my swing," Seth said rudely to Logan.

"Why don't you get lost, Seth?" William shouted, a little surprised he was confronting Seth.

Shocked, Seth quickly turned and looked at William with mean eyes. But before Seth could say or do anything, three more classmates shouted angrily, "Yeah, you get lost, Seth!"

Now even more shocked, Seth looked at his classmates and said quietly, "You guys are all losers." Then he walked away.

Solar System

The sun is in the middle of the solar system. Eight planets move in a circle around the sun. The eight planets travel in the same direction, but they do not travel at the same speed.

The solar system is split into two parts by an asteroid belt. The first part, which is near the sun, is called the inner solar system. The inner solar system is home to the planets that sit near the sun: Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars. The outer solar system holds four planets: Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. These four planets sit far away from the sun. Until 2006, Pluto was thought to be a planet. Scientists now say that Pluto is not a planet.

All the planets in our solar system are very different. Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars are very small planets, but Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune are very large planets. The small planets are made of rocks and metals. They are heavy and do not have rings around them. The large planets are made of gas. They do have rings around them.

Up and Down

There is a new girl in my class at school. Her name is Tahira and she is from Pakistan. The first day she was in class, the teacher made her stand up in front of the class and tell everyone about her home in Pakistan.

My teacher also asked Tahira if she knew any games that she could teach the rest of the class. Tahira said that there was a game she liked called Up and Down. She said it was a lot like playing tag, but this game was even more fun. She told us that instead of having one home base, there were several. The base was anything you could climb on to get off of the ground.

After Tahira told us all about the game, the teacher said we could go outside and play it with her. Everyone was jumping on benches, climbing on stumps, and hanging from branches. Tahira was right. Up and Down was even more fun than playing tag.

Fishing Trip

Yesterday, I went fishing with Grandpa. He and I don't get to see each other often. But when we do, we always go fishing. Grandpa tells me all about life when he was younger. Most of what Grandpa tells me is very interesting. For example, he said that when he was younger he would spend every summer with his grandfather working on a farm.

Grandpa wanted to take me to the best spot on the lake, where all the fish bite. He had a big tackle box full of neat plastic spiders and shiny lures. But he said the best bait for big fish is a squirmy worm. He said worms were the reason my mom never went fishing with him.

After I put my hook in the water, I waited a long time before I felt a tug on the line. Then I felt an even stronger tug.

"Grandpa, I caught one," I yelled.

He had to help me reel it in. I almost fell in the water.

When we finally got the fish out of the water, Grandpa told me I caught one of the largest fish he ever saw in that lake. This made me proud.

Being a Student and a Teacher

Ever since Marco started reading books by himself, his mother said he should also read to his little sister, Erika. Erika was four and loved it when Marco read to her. And Marco loved reading to Erika!

Marco made sure to practice reading a lot at school so that he could keep becoming a better and better reader. He wanted to read stories to Erika like his teacher read stories to his class. His teacher *always* made books exciting when she read them aloud.

One night, as Marco read a story to Erika, Marco turned the page of the story and...all of a sudden, Erika read four of the words on that page. She read them all by herself!

Marco shouted, "Great job, Erika! You are learning how to read!"

Erika yelled with excitement and then tried to read more words on the next page. Marco realized that he was not only a terrific student for practicing his reading in school, he was also an excellent teacher when he read to Erika at home.

My Favorite Teacher

My favorite teacher is Ms. Greene. She teaches science. Every day when we go to class, I learn something new because she makes learning fun.

In class we read our books aloud, but Ms. Greene makes each student use a funny voice and pretend to be a scientist. When we are through reading, we talk about everything we read so that Ms. Greene knows we were listening and paying attention. But, the best part is what happens next. After we finish talking, Ms. Greene always has something fun for us to do. The fun activities usually help us remember more of what we have learned.

Last week, when we learned about air, Ms. Greene gave us all plastic soda bottles with balloons attached to them. When we tried to blow up the balloon inside of the bottle, it would not inflate. She said that even though we could not see it, the bottle was full of air. This is why we could not make the balloons inflate using the soda bottle. Ms. Greene is really smart and really fun.

Dragon Whiskers Candy

When you hear Dragon Whiskers Candy, what comes to your mind? Do you think that this candy is made from a dragon's whiskers? Do you think a dragon made this candy with its whiskers?

Actually, Dragon Whiskers Candy is a soft and crunchy candy. This candy was invented over 2000 years ago in the Chinese palace. At first, only Kings, Queens, and their family could taste this rare candy. But after many, many years, Kings and Queens no longer existed in China. This meant ordinary people could now try Dragon Whiskers Candy. Even today, this is a very well-liked candy in China and nearby countries.

Dragon Whiskers Candy is made of corn syrup (sugar), peanuts, and coconut. The sugar is stretched by hand into thousands of white, silky threads. Then, these threads are wrapped around crushed peanuts, shredded coconut, and sesame seeds. Once you have tried this candy, you will never forget its taste!

The Contest

Tanisha loves to build things. Her mom says that she has always loved to build things and that even when she was very small she would stack her toys to make giant buildings. Tanisha builds with any materials she can find. Sometimes she even builds things with playing cards and straws.

Last weekend, Tanisha went to the mall for a building contest. When she arrived at the mall, she saw a huge pile of food that her mom and friends brought for the contest. There was food in bags, food in boxes, and food in cans. Tanisha had to build something big and strong with different types of food.

After working all day, Tanisha built a giant model of a roller coaster. She was a little sad when she only won second place, but her mom said she should be very proud. Tanisha thought about what her mom said.

Tanisha thought, "I should feel proud because all the food I used will be given to people who need it. Plus, I won second place for being so creative!"

Public Speaking Jitters

Jacob's heart pumped rapidly as he anticipated his principal calling his name. Jacob was going to give a speech in front of the whole school today.

Jacob thought to himself, "What if I trip walking to the stage? What if I stumble over my words? Everyone will laugh at me."

Jacob tried to calm himself by focusing on what he learned about public speaking. He thought to himself again: "Did I practice and practice this speech until I memorized most of it? Yes! Did I practice it in front of friends and family? Check!"

Finally, Jacob was called onto the stage.

As Jacob walked smoothly up the stairs, he continued thinking about the things he must do before starting his speech. When he reached the podium, the first thing he did was gaze into the back of the auditorium. This way, he did not have to look directly into the eyes of the audience, but still gave the impression he was looking at them. Then, Jacob silently recited to himself, "I've done the best that I can, and I am prepared to give this speech." Jacob felt his nerves calming. Taking one last deep breath, Jacob smiled and began his speech.

History of Electricity

In 1752, Benjamin Franklin flew a kite during a lightning storm so that he could show that lightning was electrical. He tied a metal key to the kite so that the lightning would hit the kite. He was happy to show that lightning was electric, but Mr. Franklin could have been seriously hurt when the electricity moved down the kite and gave him a shock.

In 1879, another man found a way to use electricity to make a light bulb. His name was Thomas Edison. Mr. Edison had been trying to make a light bulb for many months before he came up with a light bulb that worked well.

Within 10 years, Edison had also designed electrical stations so that people could have electricity in their homes. By 1930, most people in cities had electricity, but it cost a lot of money and few people who lived in the country had electricity.

President Roosevelt thought that everyone should have electricity. Because of this, he set up programs to help bring electricity to poor people in the country. Today, almost everyone in the United States has electricity in their homes.

Dinosaurs

Dinosaurs were huge reptiles that lived over sixty-five million years ago. Some dinosaurs ate plants and some ate other dinosaurs. For a long time, scientists believed that dinosaurs were not very intelligent. Later, however, scientists learned that many dinosaurs were smart. This is because some dinosaurs were able to hunt in packs. They teamed together and then attacked their prey. Also, some dinosaurs were smart because adult dinosaurs worked in groups to take care of baby dinosaurs.

Scientists called paleontologists dig dinosaur bones from the ground and put them together, kind of like a puzzle. Many of these dinosaur skeletons are put into a museum for people to see and learn about. Some dinosaur skeletons can be three stories high!

Dinosaurs looked very different from each other. For example, some had two legs; others had four legs and walked like dogs and cats. Some dinosaurs even had wings and flew in the sky like birds. The smallest dinosaurs were less than two feet tall. The largest dinosaurs stood almost sixty feet tall. Although dinosaurs no longer exist, they are very interesting to study. You can learn more about dinosaurs at places such as libraries and museums.

Field Day

Tomorrow is field day at my school and everyone is excited. This means that instead of doing school work most of the day, we have a full day of games and sports. In preparation for tomorrow's activities, teachers are asking everyone to sign up for three events. Events include frisbee fling, three-legged race, tug-of-war, field hockey, and more. I signed up for soccer, water-balloon volleyball, and the sled race. I can't wait to participate and watch my classmates compete.

On the morning of field day, the weather was gray and muggy. It seemed like it could rain and I knew that our principal would cancel field day if it rained. I also knew that everyone in the school would be devastated if field day was cancelled.

That morning, I could see that everyone was afraid field day could be cancelled, even the teachers. Just as it turned nine o'clock, our principal made an announcement.

"Children," Mrs. Martin's voice said quietly from the speaker in my classroom, "it's time for field day!"

Everyone in my class shouted with happiness, and I heard the children shouting throughout the hallways. Soon, all the kids in my school were outside, playing, running, and having a great field day.

Sharks

A shark is a type of fish that eats a lot of other fish. Sharks have very tough skin. They can be as little as nine inches, such as a pygmy shark. They can be as large as thirty-nine feet, such as the whale shark.

Sharks have bones that are rubbery. This helps their bodies to move smoothly through the water and be very flexible. Sharks breathe using gills. As water passes over the gills, the shark takes in oxygen to stay alive, just like humans breathe air to stay alive.

Sharks have very sharp teeth to help them chew when they eat. Sharks can actually smell underwater, which is how they find food. Some sharks eat very tiny sea creatures called plankton. But some sharks eat animals, like seals. Sharks can be dangerous, but they don't like the taste of people. It is rare that people will see sharks when swimming in the ocean. But you should always listen to the lifeguard if she says you should stay out of the water.

Jimmy Carter (Born October 1, 1924)

Jimmy Carter was the thirty-ninth president of the United States of America. He was president from 1977 to 1981. Before he became president, Carter was a senator and a governor in the state of Georgia.

When Carter was young, he loved to read and was thought to be a gifted student. Carter says he was greatly influenced by his parents and a high school teacher. Carter also served in the Navy and worked aboard a submarine. After the Navy, Carter went back home to work in his family business as a peanut farmer. He was successful and later became involved in state politics.

As president, Carter developed special organizations for national education and national energy. Carter also worked very hard to help people around the world have equal rights. Similarly, Carter was very involved with helping countries maintain peace. For example, he helped Egypt and Israel establish peace instead of being at war.

Even though Carter is no longer president of the United States, he still works to make sure people throughout the world have equal rights. In 2002, Carter received the very admirable Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to establish peace and equal rights throughout the world.

Hockey

Hockey is a sport that is usually played on ice. Sometimes it is played indoors in an ice arena, whereas sometimes it is played outside when the weather is very cold. The main goal in hockey is for players to use their hockey stick to hit a puck into the other team's net. A puck is a round, black disk made of hard rubber. It is usually one inch thick and three inches in diameter.

Unlike many sports, where players must run on their feet, ice hockey players use skates to glide on the ice. Skating requires a lot of energy, and so it is common that hockey players only skate for one or two minutes before they take a quick break from being on the ice. During a player's break, a different player gets on the ice. When hockey players are on the ice, this is called their "shift." Although each shift is usually no more than a couple minutes at a time, players skate many shifts per game and are usually very tired at the end of a game. Ice hockey is very popular in many parts of the world. Have you ever watched people play ice hockey?

J.K. Rowling

Joanne Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter series, was born in England on July 31, 1965. She was a single mother and made very little money when she published her first Harry Potter book.

The main ideas for the Harry Potter stories came about when Rowling was waiting for a train. Throughout the four-hour wait, and without a pen, Rowling continued to think about her main character, Harry. She also thought of many other characters she would eventually write about. When she finally returned home, the first few pages of her first book emerged.

The first Harry Potter book took Rowling about five years to complete. During this time, she moved from one place to another, and balanced her jobs as a teacher and a mother. Also during this time, Rowling's mother died. Rowling admits that her favorite chapter of her first book was written in memory of her mother.

Despite that Rowling finished her first Harry Potter book in 1995, Rowling faced rejections from publishing companies. A year later, she finally received the long-awaited news that her book would be published. Since then, Rowling has continued to publish books as part of the Harry Potter series.

Save the Honeybees

Honeybees are bees that make honey. Without honeybees, we would not have honey to eat. We would not have honey in our sweet desserts or drinks. Not only that, we would also have less food to eat. For example, we would have fewer cucumbers, pumpkins, apples, blueberries, almonds, and cherries. This is because bees are also important for pollination. Without pollination, plants cannot grow fruits, vegetables, and nuts. Without bees, some of our favorite foods could not grow. Thus, it is important that we save the honeybees.

Honeybees are now disappearing all across America. But why?

There are no final answers yet. But there are many ways to help. One way is to plant colorful flowers and different types of flowers. This way, bees can get pollen from the flowers. Then they can use the pollen to make honey.

Another way to help is to buy food at the local Farmer's Market. Most local farmers do not use chemicals to grow fruits and vegetables. Chemicals can kill honeybees. It is smart to ask the farmers if they use chemicals before buying food from them. It is smart to try to save the honeybees.

Coral

Coral does not look very much like an animal, but it is. Coral is a tiny sea animal called a polyp. Polyps come in many different colors, such as brown, green, yellow, orange, and red. Coral feed on the plankton in the water around them and the algae that lives on them. Coral feed more at night than they do during the day. Coral are also eaten by snails and fish.

There are three kinds of coral: hard, soft, and sea fans. Hard corals are the kinds of coral that make up coral reefs. These polyps live in groups and attach to one another to make coral reefs. They look more like rocks than animals. Soft corals cannot make reefs because they do not have hard skeletons. They live in water where there is very little light. Soft corals always have six tentacles and look more like plants than animals. Sea fans also look like plants. They have many branches and most sea fans are active only at night. Sea fans grow in shallow water and can grow up to two feet tall.

Helen Keller (1880 - 1968)

Helen Keller was born in a small town in Alabama. When Helen was one and a half years old, she got very sick. When she became well again, Helen could not hear or see. This made growing up very hard for Helen.

When Helen was six her parents tried to help her. They found her a teacher named Anne Sullivan. Interestingly, Anne also had very poor sight. But in just a short time, Anne taught Helen sign language. From this point on, and with Anne's help, Helen learned more and more each day.

Helen ultimately learned to read in five languages and learned to write. She was the first deaf-blind person to enter college. Helen also visited thirty-nine countries around the world, meeting kings, queens, and presidents. She gave speeches about the experiences and rights of people who are deaf or blind.

Helen also helped to raise money to support the rights of numerous individuals. Helen wrote many books, inspired artists, and received countless awards. Despite her disability, Helen was a talented leader and activist. Through her actions, Helen helped to show the world that disability does not mean inability.

Helping to Save Our Earth

Mr. Hadad, my fourth grade teacher, taught us that there are many things people can do to help save our earth. He said this is important because we must protect the earth from pollution and help to conserve resources. At first, I did not know what Mr. Hadad meant by all of this. But after we discussed these things in class today, I learned how even I can help to save our earth.

One way to help is by recycling reusable products, such as paper and plastics. Mr. Hadad showed us plastic products with little triangles printed on the bottom of the container. He said that bottles labeled with special numbers are recyclable. Then he showed us places in the school where we can recycle paper, plastics, and cans.

Mr. Hadad also taught us that we can help conserve resources by turning off utilities when they are not in use. For instance, turning off the faucet when brushing our teeth helps to save water, and shutting down the computer at night helps to save electricity. Mr. Hadad told us that our parents will like it when we do this, because it will also save them money.

Solar and Lunar Eclipse

Eclipses occur a few times each year. There are two kinds of eclipses: a lunar eclipse and a solar eclipse. A solar eclipse can be seen two to five times per year and a lunar eclipse can be seen at least twice a year.

A solar eclipse happens when the Moon passes between Earth and the Sun. When this occurs, the Moon blocks out the Sun so that we do not see it. Most solar eclipses are partial eclipses and only part of the Sun will be blocked out.

The other type of eclipse is a lunar eclipse. A lunar eclipse happens when Earth passes between the Sun and the Moon. When the Moon is in the middle of the Earth's shadow, none of the sun's light will reach the Moon. Because of this, the Moon will not be seen in the sky. But, when the moon is on the edge of the Earth's shadow, some light will reach the Moon and it will appear yellow.

Rainbows

Have you ever wondered why rainbows appear? The process is complicated, but there are scientific reasons that rainbows appear. The explanations for rainbows are mostly related to sunlight and raindrops.

Sunlight is made of many different colors of light. Each color of light has a different wavelength. Light with long wavelengths appears red, orange, and yellow. Short wavelengths look green, blue, and purple. When sunlight hits a raindrop, the light is bent as it enters the raindrop and bends again as it leaves the raindrop. Because each color has a different wavelength, the raindrop bends each color of light in a different direction so that each color will show all on its own.

Even though raindrops bend light into many colors, we don't see rainbows every time it rains because the sun has to shine from just the right spot. If the sun is low in the sky during rainfall, and there is rain both in front of you and far off in the distance, you will have a better chance of seeing a rainbow.

Avocado

Avocado, sometimes called the alligator pear, is a green and yellow, pear-shaped fruit that has the consistency of soft butter. The skin of an avocado is similar to an alligator's: smooth, glossy and dark green. One should not eat the skin of an avocado.

It is believed that avocados originated in Mexico, but they are now found in warm climates in the United States, such as California and along the Gulf coast. These fruits are high in the good kinds of fat, vitamin B, vitamin E, and other nutrients people need every day. They are very delicious, too.

Guacamole is one familiar dish that uses avocado. Some might also eat avocado on a sandwich, in a salad, or simply by itself.

Avocado trees take a minimum of four years before they bear the first fruits. It helps to surround your new tree with several other blooming avocado trees to help with pollination. Some trees may never produce any fruits, even in ideal conditions. But a non-producing avocado tree will not be gone to waste. Avocado trees provide fresher air, spacious canopy, and when they get older, they are fun to climb.

Importance of Exercise

You probably know that milk is good for your bones and that fruits and vegetables give you important vitamins. But do you know why you should exercise? Any form of physical activity (such as jumping, running, skipping, climbing, and dancing) is a form of exercise and is beneficial for your overall well-being. Maintaining a healthy heart and increasing one's endurance are two of the many benefits of exercise.

Physical activity helps to decrease heart-related diseases, such as high blood pressure and diabetes. A healthy heart does not need to work as hard, thus making it easier to help get rid of toxins from your body. Thus, exercising makes your heart work better and helps other parts of your body work faster.

Physical activity also increases your endurance. This means that you can continue physical activities longer. For example, if you do not exercise daily, running for five to ten minutes might make your stomach and legs hurt. However, if you exercise regularly, running five to ten minutes should be easy. Therefore, in addition to eating and drinking healthily, daily exercise is important for keeping your heart and body healthy.

Easy Hot Cocoa Recipe

Delicious, creamy and chocolaty, this drink will cure any sweet tooth on a cold winter day.

To make hot cocoa, first you need these ingredients: skim milk, unsweetened cocoa powder, sugar, salt, and whipped cream. You will also need the following materials: a cooking apron, a microwavable cup, a tablespoon, a small whisk, and an oven mitten. Now you're ready to begin preparing the hot cocoa.

First put on the cooking apron (in case of spills). Next, heat one cup of skim milk in a microwavable cup for about 1.5 minutes. Make sure the milk gets very hot but does not boil. Take the cup out of the microwave with an oven mitten because the cup will be very hot. In the cup, add two tablespoons of pure cocoa, one and a half tablespoons of sugar, and a sprinkle of salt. Stir the cocoa, sugar, and salt with a small whisk. A small whisk works better than a spoon. Heat the cocoa again for about 30 seconds and then remove the cup from the microwave with the oven mitten. Do a final whisk of the ingredients and top the drink with a dollop of whipped cream.

Alberto (Part 1 of 5)

Alberto is a tenth-grade student who lives in a small town in the western United States. When people from this town ask Alberto where he is from, he always simplifies his answer. Alberto says, "I was born in Cuba, then I lived in New York for a while, then I moved here."

In truth, Alberto lived in several places during his twelve years in Cuba and his three years in New York City. In New York, for example, Alberto moved at least eight times, mostly because his family was poor. He moved from apartment to apartment, down the street, sometimes to a connecting borough, and sometimes back to the original place. Sometimes he lived with relatives; sometimes he lived with a family he did not know very well. Alberto liked it best when he lived only with his immediate family: his mother, his father, and his two younger sisters.

One good thing about moving, Alberto always thought to himself, is that his family did not own very much furniture. This made moving much easier, especially because his sisters never carried the heavy things when they moved.

Alberto (Part 2): Alberto's Talent

Although Alberto was quiet, and rarely shared information about his life with others, Alberto was one of the best writers in his high school. In fact, one of his teachers thought he was the best tenth grade writer in the entire state.

Every time Alberto's family moved from place to place, Alberto wrote about it in his journal. Not only did he write with beautiful detail about how each place looked, he also wrote about the feelings and emotions that his family expressed. Sometimes Alberto would even try to write about the feelings and emotions of the neighbors he moved next to or the relatives he moved in with. Eventually, Alberto was writing in his journal every day. He wrote in the morning during breakfast, he wrote while riding the school bus, and he always wrote just before bed. Alberto sometimes even wrote during math class.

It was not until Mrs. Mellon, Alberto's English teacher, had each student write an autobiography that she realized Alberto's amazing talent as a writer. It was because of this talent that she asked Alberto to submit an essay as part of a state writing competition.

Alberto (Part 3): The Writing Competition

Alberto was hesitant to write the essay for the state competition. When Mrs. Mellon asked him to participate, Alberto shrugged his shoulders and told her it seemed like a waste of time.

“Why would anybody want to read what I write?” asked Alberto. “There are so many kids in this state with more exciting lives than me. Most kids even in this school are more interesting than I am. They have cars, they are on the sports team, they go on vacations and see things I’ve never seen. That’s way cooler than anything I can write.”

Rather than argue with Alberto, Mrs. Mellon simply asked, “Is that really how you feel, Alberto? I know you have writing talent that I see in only one of about one-thousand students.”

“Yeah, Mrs. Mellon. I know I’m right.”

Mrs. Mellon said nothing, though her look of disappointment was clear. Alberto left her classroom and for months they never returned to their discussion about the writing competition.

Alberto (Part 4): Recognized Potential

Although Mrs. Mellon and Alberto never discussed the writing competition, frequent assignments in Mrs. Mellon's English class started to help Alberto think differently about his talent as a writer. On several writing assignments, Mrs. Mellon would not even give Alberto a letter grade. Instead, she would make comments such as, "The ideas you express here clearly support your opinion, and your arguments are completely valid." Once Mrs. Mellon wrote, "Not a single person in class was able to express his or her thoughts so elegantly." Alberto knew from all of Mrs. Mellon's comments that he was earning an A on every assignment.

Perhaps most importantly, Mrs. Mellon frequently assigned students in the class to read each other's papers, though students' names were never on the papers. During the first assignment like this, one of the three students who read Alberto's paper exclaimed, "This is seriously the best writing we have seen. Did you write this, Mrs. Mellon?" When this happened, Alberto was silent, though Mrs. Mellon observed a subtle grin on his face.

Throughout the next few weeks, Alberto was recognized by his classmates as a very talented writer, though he was always humble about their compliments.

Alberto (Part 5): Preparing the Essay

One week before the essay was due for the state competition, Alberto submitted his essay. He never told Mrs. Mellon he was planning to do this, and he did not ask for her help.

“I submitted the essay, Mrs. Mellon,” Alberto told her one day after class, after the other students left the room.

“I’m not sure it’s something that will win a state competition,” Alberto continued, “but I don’t really care. I submitted something I am really happy with. As I wrote it, I thought more about why I write. I write for many reasons, but they all have to do with me. I never write to earn a good grade, win some competition, or make kids in the school think I’m smart. I write because it helps me think. It helps me understand people better. It helps me feel good instead of feeling angry or sad. So maybe someone else will like my essay, but even if they don’t, it made me feel good to write it. I wrote about my life.”

Mrs. Mellon smiled softly, but waited a moment to respond.

“Yes,” Mrs. Mellon finally replied. “This is what helps you to be, and to continue to grow as, such a talented writer.”

Itse Selu (pronounced “it-say shay-LOO”)

Itse Selu means “green corn” and is a four day Cherokee Festival to celebrate the New Year and give thanks. The Cherokee are people from one of many Native American Nations.

When Itse Selu begins, every home in the village is swept clean and the cooking fire in every home is put out. Later, every family in the village meets at the council house. The council house is a large building where the village holds meetings and religious ceremonies. Here, the priest says a prayer of thanksgiving before lighting a new fire.

Then the feast begins! Each family brings their own green corn. After the meal is done, the people sing, dance, and tell stories. That night, the children go to sleep, but their parents stay awake all night.

In the morning, parents wake their children at sunrise for the green corn dance. After the dance, each family takes a coal from the new fire that was lit in the council house. They then use the coal to light a new fire in their home. Lighting the new fires in the village is one of the most important parts of Itse Selu because it symbolizes new beginnings.

Spartans

If I could choose to live in any time of the past, present, or future, I would choose to live in the time of the Spartans. Spartans are known to be the greatest soldiers in history. All Spartan men and women underwent grueling physical education. Men were educated through military training, and women went through gymnastics and physical training. Everyone in this society had to be strong and physically fit. It would be nice to live in a place where I am equal to everyone.

Perhaps the Spartans are most well-known for their strategic fighting against the enormous Persian Empire. Although the Persians severely outnumbered the Spartans, the Persians ultimately lost battles to the Spartans. Although vicious on the battlefield, Spartans were, in fact, simple and disciplined people. They chose not to live luxuriously and dine lavishly. They focused on maintaining high moral values, human courage, and human strength. Neighboring city-states would admire Spartans for their simplicity, discipline, and orderly way of life. It would have been exciting to live and fight alongside these smart and disciplined citizens, as they were also some of the toughest, strongest, and most skillful warriors known throughout history.

Waking Up in a Faraway Land

Today, Malcolm woke up naturally to the soft sound of forks and spoons chiming together in a sink. He rested comfortably in his bed as he slowly awoke, and he listened for additional signs to remind him he was far from home. He detected the faint, soothing sound of water filling a bucket. In the distance, he heard small motorcycles humming—first softly, then loudly, then softly again.

Before opening the thick, brown curtains to his inexpensive but charming hotel room, Malcolm anticipated the busy portrait of aged cars and swift motorcycles kicking up dust from the dirt road outside. As he opened the curtains, the sun shot into his room like a stage light summoning the performers. Adjusting his eyes to the contrast from inside to out, he viewed the sincere, simple beauty of exactly what he suspected and hoped for. It was a hot, humid morning; dust seemed to boil in the air. As he observed, Malcolm carefully watched the lively people in this small, Central American beach town. They worked, headed to work, went about their daily errands, or simply walked purposelessly toward the beach. Malcolm smiled to himself. He knew he had escaped the busy routines of his everyday life. He was finally traveling.

Peru

Peru is a democratic country in western South America. Peruvian citizens aged eighteen to seventy are *required* to vote for their government officials.

About 500 years ago, Peru was taken over by the Spanish. The country did not become independent until 1821 and most of the people in Peru still speak Spanish.

Peru borders the Pacific Ocean and is the home of the Andes Mountains. The Andes Mountains are very tall and covered in snow. They serve as the source for most of the rivers in Peru. Some of these rivers flow to the west toward the Pacific Ocean. Others flow to the east toward the tropical rain forests and the Amazon River. Peru has the fourth-largest area of tropical forest in the world.

Peruvian culture is mostly a mixture of Amerindian and Spanish, but it is also influenced by other cultures. For example, the food in Peru is a mixture of Amerindian, Spanish, African, Italian, French, and Japanese flavors. The mixture of many cultural influences is also found in Peruvian art, literature, and music. The diverse geography and culture in Peru helps to make this country a very beautiful and interesting place to live or visit.

Ida B. Wells (1862 – 1931)

As a journalist and civil rights activist, Ida B. Wells fought for justice and equality for African Americans. Wells was born in Mississippi during the Civil War. Both of Wells' parents worked as slaves, though historians describe them as outspoken. It is believed that Wells learned this strong characteristic from her parents.

Early in her career, Wells worked as a school teacher in Tennessee. At the age of 21, Wells experienced something that greatly influenced her life's work. Having purchased a first-class railroad ticket, Wells took her seat in the ladies' coach of the railroad car. However, the train conductor demanded she move to a segregated section. Wells refused, the conductor attempted to force her off the train, and Wells responded by biting his hand. Ultimately Wells was forced from her seat, but she later sued the company for this mistreatment.

Wells first won the lawsuit against the railroad company, but the decision was later overturned. This further fueled Wells' pursuit of justice and equality. Through journalism and activism, Wells later went on to improve civil rights for African-Americans. She was a founder of the NAACP, and at the age of 67, she was one of the first black women to run for public office.

Morocco

Morocco is a country in North Africa. It is similar to the size of California and it borders both the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. Morocco is a country with diverse geography. There are beaches in the northwest, mountains in the northeast and central regions, and there are deserts in the southwest.

Morocco is a very old country. There have been people called Berbers living there since 8000 BCE. Even though the area was taken over by the Romans, Greeks, Arabs, and the French, the people with Berber ancestry still live there.

Today, most Moroccans practice Islam and many speak both Arabic and French. Arabic is the official language of Morocco, but French is often used for business, government, and education. Some Moroccans also speak Spanish or English.

Morocco did not gain its independence from France until 1956, but Morocco was the first country to recognize the United States as an independent country. Morocco protected American ships during the American Revolution and in 1777 a peace agreement was made between the United States and Morocco. This peace agreement has been in place longer than any other peace agreement the United States has made.

First Anglo-Chinese War: The Beginning of the Opium Wars

The First Anglo-Chinese War began in 1839 and is considered one of the most important historical events in the history of China. At that time, Britain wanted to acquire Chinese products such as silk and porcelain. However, China's trading laws made it impossible for foreign countries to get Chinese materials at low prices. Thus, Britain developed a plan to turn the situation around. They decided to trade opium with China.

Opium in small doses was, at that time, helpful as one ingredient in medicine. But in large doses opium was a highly addictive and harmful drug. By trading opium with China, this drug soon became the product that China bought most from Britain. As a result, Britain was now able to get the products they wanted from China.

When the leaders of China realized that many people in their country were addicted and very harmed by this drug, the leaders stopped exchanging things with Britain. After numerous legal issues and continuing conflicts, a war finally broke out between Britain and China. This incident in history illustrates just one of several examples where the strong desire for money and resources can harm a large number of people.

Ruben Dario (1867 - 1916)

Ruben Dario was a poet from the Central American country of Nicaragua. Dario was probably best known for his early influence of a movement known as modernism. Put most simply, modernism encouraged individuals to think differently from traditions, norms, and commonly held beliefs. Modernism supported different ways of thinking so that human beings could make progress and live better lives. To encourage new and different ways of thinking, Dario used artistic expression through poetry.

Dario learned how to read when he was three years old and began to write shortly after. Dario even published his first writing in a newspaper when he was only thirteen years old. This earned him the nickname of “child poet” by writers in his country.

Throughout his career as a poet, Dario traveled to many countries and was admired by many, including artists and politicians. Because Dario’s poems often challenged traditional beliefs, some politicians did not like his way of thinking. However, Dario’s poems ultimately helped people to challenge norms and feel proud for doing so. Today in Nicaragua, many streets and buildings are named in honor of Dario and his many accomplishments.