

Ginny was in a hurry. She skipped down the block and jumped over a puddle. She ran up the path and around the hedge. Saturday morning was story time at Grandma's. Several of Ginny's relatives would be there. She didn't want to be late. It was almost ten o'clock.

When Ginny reached the porch, she knocked on the oak door. She heard someone turn the doorknob. Paul, her favorite cousin, opened it. "Am I late?" asked Ginny.

"No," said Paul. "But you are the last to arrive. Let's join the others."

Story time was usually held on the back porch. Last night it had rained. It was cold outside, so they agreed to meet in the house. They sat by the cozy fireplace in the living room. Some drank hot chocolate while they listened to the stories.

Ginny clung to her book. She read the first story from her school reader. Then each of her cousins took turns reading their stories. After that, grandmother told them a funny tale. The children enjoyed hearing about life on the farm.

It was Monday evening. Rob was waiting for his dad to get home. As usual, they would trade stories after eating dinner. First, Rob read from his book. Then his father told stories about childhood baseball games. He always loved to play on the corner lot. Sometimes, his father told tall tales. Rob liked both kinds of stories. Today, Rob had a good story to read to his dad. It was about an old fur trader.

Just then his dad came through the kitchen door. “What story will you tell me tonight?” asked Rob.

His father said he wasn’t sure. “Maybe I’ll share a very exciting story about the time my friends and I won a ball game. The prize was free tickets to a Cubs game.”

After a quick family meal, the two sat down. Rob took his book from his backpack. He eagerly began reading about the fur trader. When he finished reading, he closed his book. Now he was ready to listen to his dad’s baseball story.

Marcus was an eight-year-old boy who had a brown and white puppy named Rex. Most of the time, he and his dog had fun. Today, the little boy was angry at his puppy. He wanted Rex to mind him, but the puppy had not even learned how to sit. Marcus kicked a stone with his toe. He sighed, "I've been trying to teach you a few tricks, and now I'm too tired and frustrated!" The puppy was scared and ran behind an oak tree.

Marcus's father was watching the situation. He smiled and said, "I'll give you a few clues. Learning is not easy. Treat your puppy with kindness and show him you are pleased when he obeys. Then he'll learn how to behave."

The next day, Marcus took his puppy to the wheat field behind their barn. He wanted to teach Rex how to sit on command. The little boy had stuffed crispy snacks into his pocket to use as rewards. "Come on, Rex," Marcus said. Rex wagged his tail. The puppy jumped up and licked his trainer's face. Each time Rex obeyed, Marcus told him he was a good dog and gave him a tasty snack. Marcus learned a lesson. Little deeds of kindness can make a big difference.

Becky was the new girl in gym class. She was sitting alone on a bench. She leaned on a steel post. She looked quietly at the children as they practiced flips and turns. Becky was having a hard time making friends. She had just moved into town with her family. She wished she had friends like the other children. Nobody seemed to notice her, and she was feeling left out.

Coach Margo watched her from across the gym floor. The coach wondered if Becky knew any of the skills that she had taught the team.

When Becky saw the coach walking toward her, she tried not to look nervous. Margo slowly approached the shy girl. “Hi, are you Becky?” she asked.

“Yes,” replied the girl. “I don’t know anyone.”

Margo offered to show her some of their balance beam routines. She taught Becky some new tricks. Then she introduced her to other members in the gym class. Becky was grateful for Coach Margo’s kindness. After that, she made many new friends.

Misha opened her birthday present. It was from her grandmother. She was excited. “Cool, this is my best birthday gift ever!” Her new present wasn’t a toy. It was a camera. Now she could take pictures of birds in the park.

Misha was a bird watcher. She knew it was a good idea to try to be invisible when studying animals in the wild. Misha wanted her clothing to blend with the colors of the ground, trees, and shrubs. Bright reds and yellows might frighten the birds. She didn’t want them to fly away. Misha looked through her closet. She found her camping clothes. She thought they would be perfect for bird watching.

At the park, she took a photograph of a red-breasted robin. It was looking for worms. She caught a glimpse of a hawk gliding across the sky. The bird darted away before she could focus her camera. Next, she snapped a picture of a blue jay scolding a squirrel. The birds did not see her. Even her friends walked right past her. They did not notice Misha crouching in the bushes.

Nature has given animals ways to fool their enemies. An insect called the walking stick is an example. This insect is skinny and brown or green in color. It is a strange-looking bug. When it stands still on a twig, it looks exactly like a stick. This helps it avoid being eaten by birds.

Some lizards can change their color, helping them blend into the background. One such lizard is a gecko. It can change color when it is afraid.

The coloring of a fawn helps it blend into nature. A baby fawn is light brown. It has white spots on its back. When its mother is away, it snuggles in tall grass to hide.

Some birds change the color of their feathers with the seasons. They become white in the winter to blend in with the snow. In the summer, they turn brown. Hawks are speckled with a mix of brown, tan, and white. This camouflage helps them hide when they are perched in trees.

Animals have different ways to hide. The next time you walk in the forest, look for clues of hiding animals.

People come from far away to visit a park in the desert. This area has trees that have turned into stone. These tree fossils lay scattered on the sandy ground. It is an amazing sight to see. The red, blue, green, and yellow remains of the trees sparkle in the sun.

How did the trees turn into stone?
Why do the fossils have different colors?
Long ago the trees died. They fell to the ground. When the wind blew, sand and dirt covered the trees. Each time it rained, minerals dissolved in the soil. Rain helped the minerals seep into the dead trees. The minerals were different colors.

The water evaporated in the hot sun. The minerals stayed in the trees. They filled the cracks of the trees' trunks and branches. The wood rotted away. The minerals had replaced the wood. The trees had turned into fossils that were shaped just like the trees. Some are small. Others are huge.

Laws help preserve this park for future visitors.

During the summer, Tom and his father took long walks. They stopped to rest under an elm tree on warm days. The huge tree stood beside a narrow river. This was their favorite resting spot. Tom would remove his sandals and dangle his feet in the cool water.

One day, Tom was gazing at rocks and pebbles in the mud. He noticed something strange. It was a rock with an unusual pattern. He quickly picked it up and asked his father, “What is this? It looks like the drawing of a skeleton.”

“You have found an animal fossil,” replied his father. “A fossil is what’s left of a plant or animal that lived long ago.”

“How did the animal become a fossil?” Tom asked.

“When it died, the animal’s body was trapped in the soil. It turned into the stone you found. You might enjoy collecting fossils,” said Tom’s father. “Would you like to learn more about them? I know several books you could read.”

Tom read the books. He began to look for more fossils. Soon he had eight in his precious collection.

It was recess, and Sidney was worried. He was trying to decide what to do. Two of his best friends were having an argument. He was afraid their quarreling might turn into a fistfight.

Sidney thought and thought about the problem. Finally, he had an idea. He would try to talk them out of fighting. Sidney wanted to help them use better judgment. Their class was planning a trip to the museum next Tuesday. He knew they would not want to miss the trip.

Outside, on the playground, Sidney said, "I understand why you are both angry. Do you know what could happen to you for fighting? You could be suspended if you let this problem get out of control. You might miss next week's field trip, or you could get hurt. Shake hands and forget about arguing." The friends angrily yelled at Sidney. They told him to stay out of their business.

Sidney persisted. "Look, if you want to fight, go ahead. I'll find new friends who will get along." The two boys realized the argument wasn't worth losing a good friend, so they shook hands.

Danny was concerned because he had lied to his teacher. He was afraid to tell the truth, so he decided to talk to his friend, Debra. He asked her if she always told the truth.

“Well, I know it’s better,” Debra calmly said as she tightened her scarf. “My mother says lying just makes things worse. She says when we stretch the truth we lose a little piece of trust. I know I feel terrible even when I exaggerate.”

“I know,” groaned Danny. “I’m upset because I broke a window at school. I said I didn’t do it. I blamed someone else. Now I feel awful about fibbing.” Debra felt sorry for Danny. She told him to explain what happened to his teacher. After a while, he agreed.

The next day, Danny confessed. He was relieved. His teacher was grateful he had the courage to tell the truth. His parents were proud he had been honest. He felt so good. Danny did extra chores at home. He stayed after school to help his teacher. Everyone was happy because Danny finally told the truth.

A long time ago, Gus's family had a dairy farm. They sold dairy products. Each day Gus would wake up while it was still dark. He always helped his father. He would herd the cows into the barn. His father would guide them into their stalls. Then together they milked the animals. Gus liked to hear the milk hit the bottom of the buckets. After they finished milking, they quickly cooled the liquid. The milk was packed in ice from the icehouse.

When their chores were finished, Gus would excitedly run home. His father often took a bucket of fresh milk to the kitchen. The hard work always made them tired and hungry. When Gus sat down, he took a few hazelnuts from a bowl on the table. Mother usually served eggs, biscuits, and cheese for breakfast.

Cheese was just one of the things they made from milk. The family also produced butter. It is made from milk fat. The cream is churned until the fat turns into butter. How does the butter separate from the milk? It was a mystery to Gus. However, he liked the taste of it on his morning biscuits.

The family sat on the front porch of their brick home. Soon they heard the siren of a fire truck. That meant trouble. They wondered what might have happened. The oldest boy guessed a building was on fire. His younger brother thought it might be an accident. Their little sister was sure the firemen were hurrying to help find a lost puppy.

That evening the family sat in the kitchen. The mother and father talked to their children. The parents were concerned. What would the family do in an emergency? How would they escape if their house were on fire? They discussed the problem. They decided on a plan.

The family needed to stay calm. First, they had to get out quickly. If the house was smoky, crawling on their hands and knees was a good idea. Then they would meet in the front yard. Once they were all together, they would know everyone was safe. The oldest would use the neighbor's phone to call 9-1-1. The rest of the family would wait for help.