

First Place (Third-Grade Student)

The Journey of a Rice Seed
By Nathan Azevedo
Maxwell Elementary School
Kelly Broman, Teacher
Colusa County

Hi! I'm Ryan the rice seed. I've been taken to a big airplane called a crop duster. The guys put me into the crop duster and the crop duster took off. It was a lot of fun until I was let out of the crop duster. I fell into a field of water. There was a lot of dirt at the bottom of the field. I was finally at the bottom of the field and I noticed a lot of other seeds. The dirt felt a lot like smashed tomatoes.

I turned around and saw my best friend Ron the rice seed. So I tried to get to Ron but I couldn't move. I found a stick and put it in the ground and I pulled up hard and I flew across the water and landed right next to Ron. Me and Ron played a lot together.

One day Ron started to grow a sprout. Ron finally got his head out of the water. But I was still at the bottom of the field. I started to cry. I went to bed and when I woke up I touched my head. I could feel a sprout!

The next day I grew bigger and I finally popped my head out of the water. I saw Ron but he was at the other end of the field. I saw a man walk by he said "look at all these heads of rice."

One day I turned gold. I thought I was turning into a banana. I started to scream. I don't want to be a banana! Everybody looked at me. They all said all at once "we're not turning into bananas!"

The next day a big red machine came with big spikes on the front of it. It was called a harvester. Then they brought in a big yellow machine with a spout. It was called a bankout wagon.

The men started up the harvester and they were coming straight toward me. Then they cut me. It didn't feel good at all. Next the bankout came and harvester pressed a button and I flew out the spout into the bankout. Then the bankout went to a truck and they poured me out of the spout into the truck.

The truck took me to a place where they weighed me. Then they took me to a place where they dried me with hot air. After that I was taken to a building where I was packaged and taken by a truck to the store. A woman bought me and took me to her house. There was a boy and a dad. While I was being cooked the woman called Fred to come and eat. Then the woman put me on a plate and gave it to Fred. Fred ate me. And now I'm here in Fred's stomach writing this story.

First Place (Fourth-Grade Student)

The Great California Food Pyramid Adventure

By Katie Ann Clyatt

Mt. Shasta Home Study

Dawn Fryling, Educational Facilitator

Siskiyou County

Katie, Chenelle and Tony built a giant "food pyramid" to enter into the State Fair. All the products in it were grown in California. Tony was drawing a picture of a tomato to add to the pyramid. Katie's little sister Emmy volunteered to go hang it up. After a while Katie said that they had better go check on Emmy. Out in the yard there was still no tomato on the pyramid.

Where was Emmy?

"Look, there are her footprints," said Katie.

They followed the footprints to a small hole. Katie looked down and tumbled right in! Toby and Chenelle followed.

When the three friends stood up they found themselves on the bottom level of the pyramid. They had landed on a giant loaf of bread.

"Wow! This is awesome!" said Chenelle.

They could see Emmy's foot prints in the flour. It looked like she was headed toward the crackers.

"She must have been here," said Katie, "See that big bite."

They were following her trail when all three fell right into a dish of pasta.

"Not bad! This is my favorite kind," said Tony.

"I prefer rice," said Chenelle as she hopped over into a bowl of rice.

They climbed the stairwell going up into a new level. Soon they were in a forest of broccoli. They stepped onto giant peas and began to roll around. They squished their way through the mashed potatoes and fell into bowl of squash. They dried themselves off with lettuce leaves. That's when they discovered another clue. Emmy had nibbled on a carrot!

A string bean path lead to a room filled with fruit. They knew Emmy had been there because there was Tony's tomato. They headed over to the apple mountain. They walked under a bridge of grapes which led down to strawberries. They crossed the river of orange juice on a kiwi boat. Everyone had a nice drink. They climbed stairs made of blackberries.

This door led to a room filled with all kinds of animals. Chickens, cows, fish and pigs all filled the room. They carefully climbed over the eggs into the dairy section of the pyramid. They pulled and pushed each other through the holes in the Swiss cheese, swam through a milk stream and ate some yogurt.

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Katie spotted a trap door on the ceiling. They climbed into the top of the pyramid. There was Emmy munching on an oatmeal-raisin cookie!

"Wow! I didn't know there was so much yummy food grown in California," said Emmy.

All three climbed through a hole and slid down the side of the pyramid. They landed in Katie's backyard. It was morning and Tony's Dad was there to drive them to the fair.

"Boy, you guys are up early! Did you already have breakfast?" he asked.

"We had a feast!" they said. And off they went.

First Place (Eighth-Grade Student)

What is That?
By Bree McCool
Los Osos Middle School
Siegrid Fenn, Teacher
San Luis Obispo County

It was a deadly hot afternoon at Los Osos Middle School and the lunch bell had just rung. Samantha and Freddy sluggishly made their way to their lockers and got their lunches. As soon as they hit the lunch table they hurriedly grabbed their drink.

"YUM!!" Freddy practically shouted. Samantha was thinking the same exact thing. They poured out their lunch and Samantha saw a round, hairy thing fall out of the bag onto the floor.

"What is that?" Freddy curiously said.

"My mom calls it a kiwi," she replied.

"Is there fruit or seeds in it?" Samantha wondered. She got a fork out of her bag and tried to cut it with her fork, bracing herself, waiting for what was inside. She had barely cut into it when she heard a noise.

"HEY!!" the noise said.

"Did you just talk?" she asked as she turned it over.

"Yes, I did talk. The name's Skip, and you're Samantha right??" he asked.

"Yeah. I thought that fruits couldn't talk," she said trying to reassure herself.

"I'm here to talk to you about kiwis because you obviously don't know one thing about my people," he explained. "All you have to do is say 'abra-cadabra' and we'll go!" he exclaimed.

"Take me to kiwi land," she said out loud. Poof!! Bing!! Bang!! Caboom!!

"Welcome to kiwi land. Kiwi plants grow in areas that are sunny and don't have any strong winds. The soil is acidic, well drained, and is rich in organic matter," Skip said to Samantha and Freddy.

"I didn't know that kiwis are so picky about how and where they are grown," Freddy said, as he looked surprised at the idea.

"We are also very picky about our watering. The crop needs massive amounts of water every day. Our planters get problems in which they can only control to an extent. Our trunks smell like catnip so cats rub up against us and rub off our new stems. Gophers cut up the roots with their teeth and deer eat our leaves."

"What about the nutritional value?" Samantha asked.

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"Well there are a lot of nutritional vitamins you get. The kiwi is higher in vitamin C than an orange and has more dietary fiber than a bowl of bran flakes. This particular fruit also has more potassium than a banana, contains vitamin E and protein," Skip clarified.

"When do you harvest the kiwi?" Samantha asked.

"The plants are planted in late spring to early summer and are harvested around mid-November."

"So now try a kiwi," he offered.

"Are you sure?" they asked.

"Yea, first peel off the skin" he said with a wink.

"Ok," Samantha replied She carefully peeled off the skin and took a bite. Whoosh!! They were back at the school cafeteria.

"Mmmmm," she said, "try it Freddy." He took a bite and liked it too. The day went on to be not quite as hot and soon Samantha and Freddy went home.

Second Place (Third-Grade Student)

The Only One
By Meghan Vanderford
St. Mary Elementary School
Laura Brosterhous, Teacher
Sacramento County

There once was a cucumber who was 4 years old. He wanted to become a pickle, because his parents, grandparents and older brothers and sisters were pickles. He wanted to look the same as his family.

So, he went to his Grandfather's house on day and told him about his troubles. He said, "I'm the only cucumber in our family, Grandfather Dill, how can I become like you?"

Well my Boy, our family story goes way back in history, three thousand years ago in India, which is where our ancestors came from. From Asia, they moved to Greece and Italy, where the Roman really like to eat us. The Romans thought we were so good to eat they told the French people in the 9th century, and they shared with the people from England in the 14th century. Finally they sailed to North American in the 16th century and that is when we arrived here in America.

We got the name cucumber from the word cowcumber, because in the late 1600s people thought that any fruit or vegetable grown in orchard of garden caused diseases and deaths, because they were not cooked. People were afraid to eat cucumbers, so we were fed to cows.

We are a gourd, like the pumpkin and squash that you see during Thanksgiving time. When we were planted in gardens or big fields we like a lot of water and soil with manure and compost. Cutworms love to eat us when we are young plants near the ground. When we become older we are sometimes attacked by a striped or spotted cucumber beetle. Life is dangerous for us when we are young.

Finally, if we live through all of Mother Nature's pests we grow up to be crisp, healthy and crunchy cucumbers like you my boy.

But, Grandfather you never told me how you became a pickle.

Well, I did get a little off the subject, so pay close attention and here the story goes... First, we must be scrubbed, ouch to remove loose spines. Next, we are soaked in salty water called brine. Then we are preserved which means to save or keep in vinegar or some other food acid. So we will stay fresh. We can be flavored with different seasonings, like cinnamon, garlic and dill. Does that answer your question?

Yes, but now I wanted to stay a cucumber.

Second Place (Fifth-Grade Student)

Papa's Long Night
By Marshall Lehw
Valley Center Upper Elementary School
Kathy Shea, Teacher
San Diego County

That night I couldn't think of anything of anything except my father. It was a cold night and I was wondering if my father had the avocados in yet. He had been working on the project for three days with no sleep.

I had gone to pick with him in the morning of the first day when it was warm. But as it got closed to night he sent me away even though I did not want to go home. He was very worried.

I was fearful in my bed. If he didn't deliver this crop, how would we raise money for this year? It was much worse this year, I almost was sure it was going to snow. I could see my father going around turning up the blowers and filling the smudge pots. I imagined him shining the huge lights so workers could pick all night long. I could see three nylon bags filling up until they held forty pounds each.

I was worried someone might fall, just like my good friend Gervacio. The first day when I was there, we were on thirty foot ladders with our fourteen foot long poles clippers picking avocados. Gervacio fell bad broke his ankle. They carried him to a truck and took him to the hospital. He cannot work now.

I heard the forklifts going to the groves. I knew that they were picking up the 800-pound bins that the workers had stocked from the harvest. The boom truck was coming closer. I could hear its loud grumble. As it came, I felt good that the avocados were safe. I heard the forklifts raising their load and putting them on the boom truck. I counted each time the forklift dropped off a bin. After twenty-four times I knew the boom truck would leave and come back for another load. I counted four more trips.

I was hoping my father would come home then, but he didn't. He had to go make sure the crop was in the packing house safely. The full load would have to go into huge refrigerators for another twenty-four more hours to ripen them.

All of sudden I heard the loud noise of many avocados rolling from the packinghouse. I hoped it wasn't a load or bin that had fallen. I heard many cranks from the wheels and the rubber of the conveyor belt pulling yesterday's load into the sorting equipment. Then I knew the avocados were being brushed and washed. I could hear the diesel engines of the big trucks filling the emptiness of the night. Soon they would be sending our avocados to grocery stores.

I woke up feeling a rough hand against my face. My father kissed me and said good night. I saw him through my window walking back to the grove with his cowboy hat on. Little spots of snow were catching on his brim.

Second Place (Sixth-Grade Student)

California Day Dream'n
By Ariana C. Bye
Horizontal Instructional Systems
Gail Harris, Teacher
Placer County

Finally it was Friday and I had two weeks of Christmas Vacation to look forward to. Our teacher, Miss Agatha Culture, was explaining to the class how the holidays help agricultural businesses. "How could holidays be important to agriculture?" I wondered.

I lived in California, where there are many farms and ranches. Our school was even built next to a farm.

I stared out the window and watched the workers in the fields and orchards as they went about their jobs.

The longer I stared out the window, the softer Miss Culture's voice became, until I could barely hear her at all.

Soon, I began to daydream. I thought I heard Miss Culture ask me a question, but when I turned around to answer her, I was in a vineyard! I said to myself, "Why grow so many grapes?" "So we can drink some and eat some," a voice said and up popped a worker from behind a row of grapes. "There are over 8,000 varieties of grapes," he said. "Some are grown for eating and some juiced, but most are used in wines and champagnes, which adults around the world drink to celebrate the coming of the New Year."

As I turned to look at all the grapes, I suddenly found myself in a field of flowers! "Wow, look at all these beautiful flowers I wonder what they're grown for?" "I grow and sell these flowers to markets and flower shops, so people can buy them to give to their loved ones on Valentine's Day and Mother's Day," said a woman in a big straw hat. The woman handed me a rose and just as I smelled it, the ground changed from multicolored to green. In my hand, instead of holding a rose, I was now holding a carrot! "Why am I holding a carrot and standing in a field of cabbages and potatoes?" I exclaimed. "Gosh and Bigorra!" a little man in a green hat said. "What would Saint Patrick's day be without a meal of cabbages, carrots and boiled potatoes? I grow them just for this special day." "Gosh, come to think of it, this is the only day of the year we have this meal." I said to the little man, but he had vanished.

In his place, stood a man that resembled a scarecrow. We were standing in the middle of a pumpkin patch. "What are all these pumpkins for?" I asked. He answered, "These pumpkins are for Halloween jack-o'-lanterns and your Thanksgiving pies.

"Those aren't pumpkins, they look like beets," I pointed to the next field. "Those aren't just beets, they're sugar beets. They're used to sweeten your Easter and Halloween candy, your apple pie for the Fourth of July, that special cake for Father's Day and birthdays," he said.

"That's so amazing," I exclaimed. "What's amazing?" asked Miss Culture. "Agriculture! Holidays! Sugar Beets!" I said.

"But Ariana, today's fieldtrip is to a Christmas tree farm," she said. "Uh Oh, am I still daydreaming?"