

First Place (Third-Grade Student)

The Night Everything Went Nuts
By Megan Gittins
Horizontal Instructional Systems
Julie Gittins, Teacher
Placer County

I had just finished reading about the lost city of Atlantis. As I was climbing into my bed that night, I said to my mom, "Wouldn't it be awful if California just vanished like Atlantis." Suddenly, there was a flash of green light the color of kiwi fruit and my room smelled of compost. California wasn't there anymore. It had vanished. I said, "Mom, California is gone!" But she wasn't there either. And, I was standing in the middle of my Grannie's grocery store. She lives in Texas.

I decided to look around the store because I was hungry. Almonds are one of my favorite snacks. They are crunchy and are filled with vitamins and minerals... and LOTS of vitamin E. I went to the nut aisle, but I didn't see any almonds. I asked the store clerk, "Have you seen any of my favorite food called almonds?"

He said, "Sorry, but since California is gone we can't get the almonds."

I really need something to eat, so I tried for my second favorite snack, cling peaches. They are filled with vitamins A and C and are loaded with fiber. They help me reach my goal of 5 a day of fruits and vegetables. I went over to the canned peach section of the store. There were none... I almost fainted.

I saw a shopper walk by. I asked her, "Are there any cling peaches here?"

"No," the lady snapped, "California has vanished. Haven't you been watching the news?" I shrugged my shoulders and walked away.

I went to find some artichokes. My mother loves them. Artichokes are filled with fiber and vitamin C. They look funny and are fun to eat. They also only have 25 calories. When I got to the fruit and vegetable section of the store, there were no artichokes. I almost cried.

Then, I took a closer look. There were no olives, prunes, pistachios or walnuts. The figs, dates, persimmons, and kiwi fruit were gone too. But worst of all, raisins were missing from the shelves. I gasped with horror. Raisins are high in carbohydrates, low in fat, and high in vitamin C. Raisins also are full of phytonutrients and antioxidants which help fight diseases like cancer. What would I put in my oatmeal cookies? Then, I really started to cry.

Suddenly, I felt my mother kissing me good night. And, I realized that California had not really vanished. It was all my imagination. I thought to myself, it is a good thing that California is here, because it is the only place in the United States that can grow all those scrumptious and healthy fruit, nuts, and vegetables that were missing in my dream. I said to my mom, "If California weren't here there would be no lemon walnut pie, no pepperoni and olive pizza, and no oatmeal raisin cookies."

I fell asleep with wonderful dreams of all the good, nutritious food that California provides for our country.

First Place (Fifth-Grade Student)

Time in the Sun
By Danny Locke
Louisiana Schnell Elementary School
Dee Desmond, Teacher
El Dorado County

Hi, I'm a baby Thompson seedless grape. I live in a cluster with all my family. We are partly shaded by big green leaves, but it is late spring and the sun feels warm on my face. We are attached to our vine by a strong stem. This stem brings us the water and minerals we need. Our vine is long and straight. My family and I had a close call this morning. A man came by and thinned some of our neighboring clusters just a few inches away from us. We almost didn't make it!

I can feel some cool water spraying on me like a shower. Farmer Jack has just started irrigating. It's a good thing, because it stopped raining last month here in the San Joaquin Valley. The sun feels good.

It's already July. The warm sun isn't just warm. It's hot! The days are long too. I've noticed that our vine seems a lot more crowded and heavier too. I guess we are all getting plumper. I think we are getting sweeter too. Sometimes a spider crawls by and tickles me.

The hot summer went by fast. My family and I have gotten round and juicy. September is almost here. It is almost harvest time, and we're ready. Sometimes birds come by, but the birds haven't pecked me.

We were cut off the vine this morning and laid on a paper tray. The farm worker worked fast and spread all of the clusters evenly so we all have lots of sun. No more nice green leaves to shade us. It's early September, and the sun is still hot. I'm starting to wrinkle already. In another week I'm going to look like a raisin! At least I still get to be with my family on our cluster for a while longer.

We are raisins now! I used to be green, but now I'm brown. I'm not juicy anymore but I'm even sweeter than I was. My family and I are still in a cluster but our stem is shriveled and not strong anymore.

We were hauled off this morning to the Home Grown Raisins plant in Fresno, California. What an adventure! It was always so quiet on the farm. I've gotten separated from some of my brother and sister grapes on our cluster. The plant has lots of strange sounds and lots of machinery. I will soon travel on a conveyor belt to be cleaned and processed.

We were all shaken up and separated. I can see that soon I will be placed in a little red box with a new raisin family.

I am packed tight in my red raisin box. I traveled again—this time to a little store in Placerville called Murphy's Grocery. Some workers put my box on the store shelf this morning, right in front. I wonder who will pick me out.

First Place (Seventh-Grade Student)

The Problem with Ignoring Agriculture

By Andrew Hoover

Visalia Christian Academy

Pennie Hoover, Teacher

Tulare County

"Don't forget your history report on California agriculture tomorrow!" shouted a teacher over the bell. Nobody heard her except Jonathan, who was probably going to be the only one to turn it in tomorrow.

"Hey Todd, wait up!" he called to his best friend. Todd slowed down.

"Did you start your report yet, Todd?" asked Jonathan.

"Nah."

"It's due tomorrow, ya know."

"Yeah, I know, but I figured I could just download an essay. Besides, I want to go to the video arcade. Who needs agriculture anyway?" complained Todd as they left campus.

"I can show you at least two people," said Jonathan. "You're looking at one. And, you'd have to look in the mirror to see the other."

"You're kidding, right?" exclaimed Todd. "Name one way I use agriculture."

"Well, did you eat any meals today?"

"Yeah, of course."

"There is one way. For another thing, did you get dressed this morning?"

"Yeah, of course."

"Well, there's another one. You have on cotton and someone had to grow that! That's agriculture."

"Even my blue jeans?"

"Even your blue jeans! Fashion would disappear without agriculture because the only clothing available would be suits of armor."

"Well, maybe we could color them for fashion statements. Purple could be an "in" thing!"

"But you need plants to make dyes."

"Well, uummmmm, so"

Imagine this... Story Writing Contest – 2001 State Winning Stories

"So you are running out of objections, dude."

"I have one more. I could be a meat eater!"

"Beef and pork are leading sources of California agriculture and unless you want to hunt, butcher and cook it yourself, it's part of agriculture."

"Well, it just seems like such a waste of time to research all that old fashioned crud."

"Old fashioned? Without agriculture today, we wouldn't be the world power that we are. We would lose important exports that bond us to other countries. The state of California relies heavily on agriculture for their income. Our state leads the nation in producing more than 250 crops including some products that are only grown in California."

"Well, I guess you're right, but it still doesn't affect my personal future. I'm going to be a scientist."

"What will you study?"

"Biology. Oh wait, never mind. How about oceanography?"

"Seaweed, fish and the underwater ecosystem provide food for the world."

Todd paused as he racked his brain for another subject. "Well, how about engineering?"

"Engineering what?" Jonathan teased.

"Good point." Todd said.

"Electrical or software engineers design and build computers that run farms that make food that you eat every day. Mechanical engineers perfect the technology at farms. Chemical engineers create specialized foods to help livestock stay healthy and grow bigger, faster. Nuclear engineers use radiation to kill bacteria on beef, pork and just about every food item in existence."

"Here's your stop, dude," Jonathan said as he and Todd reached the video arcade.

"Video arcade?! I don't have time for that. I have to get to the library and research my report if I am going to turn it in tomorrow!"

Second Place (Second-Grade Student)

The Farmer Adventure
By Seth Rhodes
Ronald Reagan Elementary School
Matthew Merickel, Teacher
Kern County

One day I walked into a field and saw a farmer planting corn. He had on overalls, a blue and orange checkered shirt, and wore a top hat. He was a magical farmer. He had a gold, magical stick. I asked him to give me 3 wishes. He said, "Yes." My first wish was to travel back in time to learn about farming in the olden days.

Before I knew it, we flew back in time to the early 1900's. There was my great, great grandpa, Ernest Hunt. He was plowing a field with a team of horses. His son, Paul, plowed fields barefoot for \$0.25 a day. Then I saw my Papa Max when he was about as old as me. He was milking cows by hand. I learned that a 40 to 60 acre farm was big enough to support a family. My grandpas were really hard workers.

My second wish was to see what farming is like today. We flew off and saw my Uncle Rodney plowing a field with a big red tractor. It had an air conditioner, a radio and a computer. He was listening to "Only in America" by Brooks & Dunn. Boy, have things changed! Uncle Rodney told me that it now takes hundreds of acres to support the same size family as before. There are better seeds and fertilizer today that make plants grow bigger and better. Now the dairies milk cows with machines. It is easier than milking by hand. Farming is a little easier now, but it is still hard work. Farming is still important to us because it feeds many families.

My third wish was to see farming in the future. The magical farmer giggled and said, "Yes, let's go!" I saw a farmer planting corn in the field. Wait, that's me! I'm 30 years old. I was using remote controlled tractors, improved fertilizer, and better seeds. Robots are hauling hay. This is cool! There are enough crops to feed the whole world.

The magical farmer said it was time to go home. We didn't get home until midnight. The magical farmer went "POOF" into thin air. I ran home as quickly as I could. I went to bed and thought about my adventure. I decided that when I grow up I want to be a farmer, too.

Farming is important to everybody. Without farming we would not have food to eat. It was important in the olden days, it's important today, and it will be important in the future.

Second Place (Fourth-Grade Student)

My Life Cycle

By Andy Vences

James B. Randol Elementary School

Joanne Granado, Teacher

Santa Clara County

I began my life as a pumpkin seed growing inside my mom. She was a prize-winning 500 pound orange pumpkin. A wonderful farmer named Sammy won this prize-winning pumpkin and took it home. Betty, his wife, took out all the seeds and made over 100 delicious pumpkin pies for all her neighbors. She decided to plant some seeds in the garden. I was one of the lucky ones.

I'd like to tell you about my life cycle beginning as a pumpkin seed. Before Farmer Sammy could plant me in the soil, he had to do some preparation to the ground. He rototilled the soil so it would be soft and I could grow. Next he added fertilizer and vitamins so I would grow strong and healthy roots. Sammy dug out a trench in the soft earth and dropped me in the ground. Suddenly I was being covered with damp, stinky soil and cool water.

My life in the soil is very interesting. There are many insects trying to eat my roots. They are also trying to eat my new green vine sprouts. Worms are constantly crawling around and through my roots. They help make the soil soft so my roots can grow down. Every day in the early morning Farmer Sammy waters me. I soon began to sprout out of my shell. As I reach for the sun, I came out of the soil a beautiful small, green vine with a couple of leaves. I continued to sprout leaves and my vines got longer.

One day a small orange flower appeared on my vine. In about six weeks, my beautiful orange flower got pollinated by the bees and my pumpkin began to grow. Farmer Sammy put pesticides on my leaves so the bugs wouldn't eat me. I'm beginning to grow larger and larger each day. Since I'm now becoming a bigger pumpkin, Farmer Sammy has to put a new type of fertilizer on me to help me grow even larger and stronger. He also built a shade cover to protect me from the hot sun.

It is the middle of summer now and I am thirsty all the time. No amount of water Sammy gives to me seems to be enough. As the summer days roll on, the humidity in the air becomes a problem for me, so Sammy applies fungicides.

About eleven weeks have gone by now and I weigh about one hundred pounds. My skin begins to get harder and I start forming ribs. My growth slows down at this time because the sun goes down earlier and the days are shorter.

Finally Sammy decides to cut me from my vines. I weigh two hundred pounds! Even though my mom weighed three hundred pounds more than me, I am very proud of myself.

Second Place (Seventh-Grade Student)

The Mycology Mystery
By Ariana C. Bye
Horizontal Instructional Systems
Gail Harris, Teacher
El Dorado County

It was a dark and stormy night. Watson and I quickly walked through the wooded path to my home, only hesitating at the gate to admire my perfect lawn with the flashlight I carried.

The next morning when I awoke, I stepped out my front door and to my horror, I viewed that my beautiful lawn was now covered with... with... **Mushrooms!!!**

What had happened?! The only difference between yesterday and today is that it rained last night. "I must uncover the mystery of this mischievous mold," I said to Watson.

Our first stop: the library. I gathered all the books about the formidable fungi in questions by myself because, well... Watson's my horse and can't come inside. I read that mushrooms magically spew forth their 16 billion seeds or "spore" in the hours that follow a summer rain. They are spread by wind, insects, and traveler's feet. "Hmmm... I did *mow* the lawn several weeks ago, just maybe... " I thought, "I could be the culprit who created this cordyceps catastrophe!"

I read on, finding that mushrooms have been used by the Egyptians and Chinese for food and medicines for more than 4,600 years, and that there are more than 75,000 varieties. Many look just like the edible kinds, but are *deadly poisonous* and that one should *never* pick up a mushroom and eat it.

"I believe I'll only pick mine up at the grocery store," I thought.

I decided to look to the internet for more information, and what a wealth of information there was. I never realized how important this sneaky spore was to California agriculture. I discovered that California is the country's largest national marketer of mushrooms and the second largest producer of them. California grows a mountainous 17%, or 137,530,000 pounds. Californians devour approximately four pounds per person per year. This is because of all the major pizza chains popping up all over California, generating enormous sales of mushrooms totaling over \$131,580,000 dollars. "A fortune in fungus for California." I say... that's elementary, my dear Watson!

Not only are they good for our economy, but they're good for us.

My research shows that they're a highly nutritious food source, containing 20% protein and a wide range of essential amino acids. They're sodium, cholesterol, and fat-free, high in fiber and provide vitamins, such as: thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, biotin, pantothenate, copper, and ascorbic acid.

Some mushrooms are being studied and used in the treatment of cancers and tumors, as well as being used for their health stimulating properties and immune enhancing abilities. In fact, a fungus is used in making penicillin, which is an anti-infection fighting drug.

Imagine this... Story Writing Contest – 2001 State Winning Stories

"Ree..markable! With all this knowledge, I believe it's now our duty, Watson, to share it with our colleagues... er... I mean our classmates. Come on, let's ride to the park and tell them! Hi yo Watson away!"

"Tune in next week when a cryptogamic carrot falls in Watson's corral in... Revenge of the Radioactive Rootcrop!"