

Third Grade

The Water Waster

By J.D. Ortiz

Kerman Floyd Elementary School

Margaret Nichols and Michelle Karagozian, Teachers

Fresno County

In the small town of Kerman, there lived an 8-year-old boy named Carter, but his family called him "the water waster." Carter was the youngest in his family so he thought that everyone always picked on him. He didn't really pay attention to the names that his brother and sister called him.

Carter did have a really big problem. His problem wasn't just once in a while—it was every single day, actually a few times during each day. He took long showers. Sometimes he would even take 40-minute showers. Most of the time he wouldn't even be in the water, he would just stand on the side of the shower and daydream as the water ran down, hitting the shower walls. His mom would yell at him, "Hurry up and get out, you water waster!" But Carter wouldn't listen, he couldn't hear what she was screaming when the water was running, but he could tell she wasn't happy.

At night he would brush his teeth and he would leave the sink faucet running as he took his time to clean every single tooth in his mouth. His sister would glare at him and yell, "Turn off that water, you water waster!"

One of his chores was to water the grass during certain times of the day but he would look for bugs, play basketball or just hang out in Lala Land while he was watering the cement driveway. His brother would yell at him, "Turn off that water hose, you water waster!"

Carter didn't understand why everyone was making such a big deal about leaving the water on. He didn't know what their problem was, and why they were trying to save water.

Finally his mom decided to sit him down and explain to him why saving water was so important. She told him that wasting water was not good for California because there is a drought. His mom said, "Because it doesn't rain a lot and because farmers need water to grow food so we can eat, we need to stop being water wasters. Plus California has a lot of wildfires, and we use tons of water when we have to fight these fires to protect people."

Carter really didn't understand how California was running out of water since water was everywhere, so he just thought she was making up stories. Carter decided his mom was trying to get him to take shorter showers so they wouldn't be late to school every morning.

That very same night Carter went to bed. But this night he did not sleep well. He had a terrifying dream; it was so bad that it felt real. In his dream, all the dried-up plants came to life. All the thirsty tomatoes, oranges, pistachios, apples and grapes were chasing him. They were dry and wrinkled, (you know how when you get out of the pool and your fingertips are all shriveled up), well in Carter's dream they all looked like that. The plants were very mad at him and they were yelling, "You water waster! You're stealing all of our water!"

Even the farmers were saying to the crops, "Get him!" They were chasing him with hay forks.

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He woke up sweating and nervous.

That morning he went to his mom. "Mom, how long should I take a shower?" Surprised she said, "No longer than 10 minutes." Carter asked her for a timer and set it for exactly nine minutes.

That night, before he went to bed, Carter watched his sister brush her teeth and noticed that she didn't let the water run. Carter then brushed his teeth and did it exactly like his sister.

The next day when it was time to do his chores he asked his brother to help him water the grass. Carter thought that he could almost hear the grass drinking, gulping, and swallowing. They were probably so thirsty since that was really the first time he ever actually did it right.

From that day on Carter promised to be a water saver and not a water waster!

Fourth Grade

The Compost Worms
By Nicole Groteguth
Gratton Elementary School
Pennie Segna, Teacher
Stanislaus County

"Stella, school today!" Momma worm said.

"I'm not ready today, Mom," Stella worm said. "Please give me, umm, how about ten hours."

"No," said Momma worm, "because this is your first day of school."

Stella had a great day at school. When she came home from school she asked her mom what they were having for dinner.

"We're going to have lettuce, banana peels, and pieces of the Earth Worm Times," said Momma worm.

"What? I thought we finished that last night!" said Stella worm.

"No honey, remember your brother left some in the dirt pile," said Momma worm.

The next morning, Momma worm called out, "It's breakfast time!"

"OK, I'm coming," Stella worm answered back. "What's for breakfast?"

"We are going to have lettuce, rotting apples, and don't forget banana peels, because that is just the right kinds of food worms love to eat." Momma worm told Stella that the food goes in the bloodstream and it is very good for worms.

Ten minutes later. "Bye Mom, I'll see you soon," said Stella worm.

At school the teacher told the class, "Today class, we are going to do fractions. Come gather around my desk and I will take a bite out of this half-eaten apple. Who can tell me how much is left?" The students all laughed as they watched. School was fun.

The teacher taught the worms all about their purpose on Earth. Worms help cultivate the soil by fertilizing and keeping it healthy for plants to survive. She mentioned that worms have been helping the Earth and plants for thousands of years.

Soon the teacher yelled, "Lunch time!"

"Uh oh," cried Stella, "I already finished my lunch during snack time!" Stella began eating her math book because she was still very hungry. The teacher walked by and noticed her. The teacher made her write, "I will not eat my math book."

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Later at school, Stella found a friend named Penny worm. They had a sleepover that night at Penny's house. They dug day and night in the garden for fun. The worms also learned at school that this allows the plants to get air from the holes.

The two worms decided to have a picnic in the garden. They cleaned up the area by eating dead, old leaves. It soon became too sunny there so they decided to go to a shady park. They found that there were too many people at the park. They became afraid they would get stepped on. Then it began to rain. They quickly hid under a leaf because if they went down into a hole they could drown.

All these explorations made Stella worm and Penny worm very thirsty. So they drank some mud juice. Water is important because it helps worms make mucus that allows them not to dry out.

Penny remembered something she learned in school. "Stella, did you know that we have a very tiny brain?" stated Penny.

Stella cried "Nooo!"

Penny reassured Stella that they had enough brain power to control their bodies.

Then Penny said, "I'm hungry." So they ate some dirt rolls. The worms learned at school that everything they eat becomes digested and turns into rich fertile soil good for plants. They both wanted something sweet to eat. They made mud pie and ate it all. When worms eat dirt they also eat the tiny stones in the soil. The worms swallow these tiny stones along with food. The food then passes into the gizzard, which is made of strong muscles. The gizzard, with the help of the tiny stones, grind the food up making it useful to the intestines.

They ate until there was nothing left. Before they went to sleep they dug a while which made them safe and very sleepy.

On their way to school the next day, they bumped into a big root because they were talking and not looking at where they were going. They weren't looking because worms don't really have eyes. So, of course they couldn't see. After school they decided to play a game called "Find your way out." The game is played by digging out of buried holes in the dirt.

Stella and Penny grew to be great worm friends. They were very proud of the way they could help the earth by cultivating the soil so plants could grow and they would be contributing to everyone's needs. They dug and they played happily ever after.

Fifth Grade

Julio's Fig Adventure
By Claudia Lopez
Fred Ekstrand Elementary School
Catherine Rojas, Teacher
Los Angeles County

Jose, his wife Margarita and their son Julio own a farm in Madera, in the Central Valley of California. They moved there from a big city because they wanted to grow crops that would feed their family and other people.

On the farm they grow a lot of vegetables and fruit trees. Of all the things they grow and produce on the farm, Julio was interested in the figs the most. His grandmother used to talk about the farm she grew up on and all the fig trees they had.

He started to research figs and he found that the Spaniards brought figs to America in the 1500s and the missionary Fathers introduced them to California in 1759.

At the farm they have two different types of fig trees. One is amber color and called Calimyrna, the other has a dark purplish skin color and is called Mission because that was the type planted by the Spanish Fathers.

Madera has dry, warm weather which is the best to grow and produce figs. The main crop ripens in late summer and produces the best figs.

Julio also learned that unlike other fruit trees, fig trees have no blossoms on their branches. The fig fruit is the flower of the tree, because flowers and seeds grow together in one mass.

Every day Julio helped his father do chores around the farm. During the summer, when school was out, Julio helped pick the ripe figs to sell at a stand on the side of the road, next to the farm.

One year, Julio heard that the county fair was coming to town. There was going to be a contest for the best marmalade. He came home so excited and asked his mom, "Could you help me make fig marmalade?"

His mom said, "Sure, why not?" Julio said, "We only have two more weeks to try the recipes."

The contest became a family project. Julio picked the figs early in the morning with Dad's help. He had two separate baskets, one for each kind; he knew that the different figs would produce different colored marmalades. Then, with Mom's help, they would start the process of making marmalade by washing the figs and cutting off the tips. They were supposed to put the figs in two big bowls, but his mom only had one. So he went into town and started to look in different stores until he found one. He was not sure about the size, but he bought it anyway. His mom thought it was perfect!

Once they cut the figs into fourths it was time to start cooking. Mom suggested making the two kinds of marmalade a little differently. The Mission figs would have water and sugar and the Calimyrna would have water, sugar and lemon juice. Julio and his mom put them in big pots over the stove. It was Julio's

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job to watch the pots and stir them every once in a while until they started to boil. Once they started to boil he had to reduce the heat and stir more frequently.

After about an hour and a half it was done. They poured the mixtures out of the pots and waited until they had cooled off so he and his mom could taste the marmalades. Julio thought the Mission had a rich dark color and the Calimyrna was a pretty amber color that he could almost see through. The taste? Well, he thought it needed to be a little sweeter. So they made another batch that came out just perfect. They poured the marmalades into a few special jars that were going to be the samples for the judges and the rest was canned in small jars to be sold.

He decorated labels for the jars, designed the booth with one area to display the produce from the farm to be sold and the other side for the marmalade.

Today was the day! The whole family woke up early, loaded the truck and headed to the fair. Julio set up his area of the booth with the jars for the judges on one side of the counter and the other side for the customers, with small containers so everyone could try it.

The judge started tasting; Julio was number seven out of fifteen. Soon after the tasting was finished, winners were announced. Julio won second place! He went up to get his trophy and ribbon.

When Julio came back he was a little disappointed but his mom and dad said, "You entered a contest for the first time and you won second place, we are very proud of you!"

Sixth Grade

The Magic Green Tractor Visits the Dairy Farm

By Anna Harris

Grenada Elementary School

Debbi Hoy, Teacher

Siskiyou County

Ms. Jersey is always taking us on crazy field trips. The latest field trip happened just last Friday. We were studying cows and all of the amazing products people get from them, when suddenly, Ms. Jersey shouted, "To the tractor, kids!"

"Not another field trip!" cried Donnie.

"Oh yes! The best way to learn about a dairy farm is to visit one!" replied Ms. Jersey.

So into the tractor we went. Zip, Zip, Zap, and all of a sudden we were at our local family-owned dairy farm.

The Duggar family has been operating this farm since 1854. Ms. Jersey asked Mr. Duggar to show us around the milking machines. We learned that it takes an average cow three to five minutes to give her milk. The extracted milk then passes through a strainer into a tank. It can be stored safely at around 42 degrees for approximately three days. He showed us how each cow had its own bed and access to food and water 24 hours a day. He told us that comfortable cows give more milk.

The milk truck was just arriving to transport the milk to a dairy factory for processing and pasteurizing. This is when the trouble began.

Ms. Jersey decided that we should hop back into the magic tractor and zap ourselves into microscopic size in order to hitch a ride in the milk tank with the milk to the factory. "We never zapped ourselves microscopic at our old school!" shrieked Alice.

But, we slid through the cooler vent anyway into the milk tank where we saw big chunks of protein and fat floating around. This would have been perfectly safe if only Donnie hadn't been lactose intolerant!

We helped him aboard a chunk of fat where he clung until finally we arrived at the factory. Ms. Jersey shouted, "Follow me, kids!" and we all slid down into a big vat. Poor Donnie was really suffering; he was holding his stomach, wailing for the bathroom.

Alice said, "Hold on, Donnie! It will be okay!"

The factory workers began separating the curds and whey. Thankfully we had hopped out and were standing on the rim of the tank by then.

The cheese makers added rennet to get the milk to coagulate. Then, starter bacteria converted the milk sugars into lactic acid. The rennet helped set the cheese into a strong texture. The soft cheese was drained, salted, and packaged for stores, right there in the factory. Ms. Jersey had to ask about making hard cheese because Parmesan was her favorite.

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Donnie was really starting to feel better so the processors explained how hard cheeses can be heated to temperatures at about 100-130 degrees. Salt is added to the cheese for flavor and preservation. The cheeses are pressed into a mold. The harder the cheese, the more pressure it takes to shape it and squeeze out the moisture.

We discovered that some cheeses are ready right away and some are allowed to age, like Brie and Camembert. Donnie asked about what kinds of cheese he could eat with his lactose intolerance. They told him that aged cheese contains almost no lactose and cheddar cheese only has 5 percent.

"Amazing discovery, Donnie!" Ms. Jersey exclaimed.

"Cheese can also help people fall asleep faster and relieve stress because it has tryptophan in it," said Alice. "I never learned that at my old school!"

"Well kids, we better board the magic tractor and get back to our regular size before we crumble like feta!"

After a very educational day at the dairy farm and factory we were all glad to be back at school.

"What a gouda field trip," Ms. Jersey said.

"Ms. Jersey!" moaned the kids. And that was the end of our journey in our green tractor!

Seventh Grade

Amy's School Garden
By Ciara Chiesa
Gratton Elementary School
Rexann Jensen, Teacher
Stanislaus County

Once there was a seventh grade girl named Amy. She decided to start a school garden, but not just any garden; she wanted it to be beautiful and useful.

She said, "I will grow flowers, herbs, lettuce, carrots, cucumbers, broccoli, corn, onions, garlic, peas, and potatoes. I will be able to give pretty flowers to my mom, my teachers, and the principal. Also, the school will have healthy and nutritious food to eat that is fresh from the garden."

Her class had just finished learning about the importance of healthy foods in a person's diet. They had also learned about the different food groups and that a person should eat a lot of vegetables each week.

Amy's idea for a school garden soon caught on and more and more students wanted to help Amy with her project. One of her friends suggested that they should try composting to add nutrients to the soil. They looked up ideas on how to compost from the library.

Some of her classmates picked up leaves at recess and some of her friends collected food scraps during lunch from the students to make compost. After the compost was ready, they added it to the soil. They mixed it in so the soil was soft and ready to plant. Then Amy and her classmates dug holes and planted the seeds.

Almost every day there was something to do in the garden. Amy and her classmates pulled weeds, watered the seeds, and made sure they received plenty of sunlight. Once a month Amy even gave them some fertilizer.

One day while she was watering, Amy's friends Lizzy, Mila and Katie came by to see her and her garden. Amy told her friends that she thought her garden was taking too long to grow. She wondered if she had done something wrong.

Lizzy said to give the plants more water. Mila suggested that Amy should give them more fertilizer. Katie told Amy she read that plants grow better when a person sings to them. Amy decided to ask her teacher for some advice too. Her teacher told her to just be patient. Amy chose to go with her teacher's suggestion.

So over the next three weeks, Amy watched and waited for the plants to grow. One day a little green sprout sprang out of the ground. The next day a few more green seedlings popped through the soil. Amy was so excited about her garden growing that she called all her friends and told them about her new discovery. The whole school was excited about the garden now. Lots of students took turns tending to the garden duties, and the plants continued to grow.

Vegetables started appearing. After a few more weeks, they started maturing until finally the day came when the vegetables were ready to be picked. Soon the garden had enough produce that Amy's class

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was able to make a really good soup and salad for the whole school to try. Some kids had never tried vegetables like these, but because they had helped in the garden, they wanted to see how they would taste. Everybody seemed to like the soup and salad. Some parents called to get the recipe because their children said it was delicious and nutritious.

From that day, Amy realized that while it is smart to have good soil, plenty of water, and fertilizer, one of the most important things of a garden is patience, patience and even more patience. Some things are worth waiting for and Amy and her classmates agreed a garden is worth the work and the wait.

Eighth Grade

Late Night Lambing
By Emma Morris
Scott Valley Junior High School
Tracy Dickinson, Teacher
Siskiyou County

I shoved my foot into my boot and tucked in my jeans. Grabbing my coat from the hook, I slipped through the door behind my dad. I gasped as I drank in the freezing morning air. It must have snowed in the few hours I was asleep because the ground was blanketed with a thin, white sheet. I stood there for a second, awed by the beauty of it all, and then slipped my coat on and ran to catch up with dad.

"Hey," said Dad, "It's beautiful huh? But this is terrible weather to lamb in, so we better go check on the ewes."

"Okay, I hope there are more babies!" I said excitedly.

We walked through the gate and into the frosty field. Most of the sheep were sleeping, but one was standing by itself. "Dad," I said, "over there."

"Yeah, let's go check it out." We walked over to the ewe and found she had three babies on the ground next to her. They were shivering violently so I bent down and put my finger in one's mouth to check its temperature—cold, not a good sign.

"Em," said Dad softly, "Grab a lamb and help me coax this ewe into the barn."

"Okay," I replied, picking up one of the babies gently. It took us about 10 minutes to get the ewe into the barn, and once we were in I set the lamb down on the soft, clean straw. The baby grunted quietly, still shivering.

"Emma," said Dad, "Plug in the hairdryer and start trying to warm these little guys up." I nodded and grabbed the battered hairdryer we use to warm up the lambs. I picked up the babies and set them together on a warm towel, and proceeded to blow hot air on their shaking bodies. After about 10 minutes, they started to warm up and tried to stand on their wobbly legs. "They're warm Dad," I said.

"Okay," he said, "Let's get them some starter fluid." "Starter Fluid" was Dad's name for some protein supplement we give lambs to get their blood flowing. I grabbed the bottle from the shelf, and squirted the thick substance into their mouths. They gulped it down, and continued trying to stand up.

"You're going to have to pick one to take inside," said Dad, "This ewe can't take care of three babies herself." I studied the babies. Two of them had stood up and were trying to get milk from their mom. The third was still struggling.

"I guess it's going to be that one," I sighed.

"I agree," said Dad, "Why don't you take him in, and warm up some milk. He's going to need something in its stomach before too long. I'll handle the rest of this."

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"Okay," I said picking up the baby and wrapping it in a towel. I carried the lamb across the yard, and then into the house. The warmth hit me and made my cheeks burn. I set the baby down in a box we had ready-made for occasions like this one. The box had fresh towels and a hot water bottle. Then I walked over to the sink to get some milk ready. First I grabbed the powder from the cupboard, and a big jug from the dishwasher. Then I put the powder in the jug, added some hot water, and poured some into a 2-liter soda bottle we use to feed the babies. I put a rubber tip on the bottle, and walked over to the box where the lamb was bleating hungrily.

I picked him up, and used my thumb and index fingers to pry open his mouth. He caught on right away, and started sucking happily, and was soon done with the whole bottle. Dad walked in right then, carrying dirty towels in his hands. He smiled and looked at the empty bottle. "Someone was hungry, huh?"

"Yeah," I replied, rubbing my eyes sleepily.

"Okay," he said, "why don't you go back to bed? Thanks for your help, kid."

"You're welcome," I said standing up and walking towards my room. I barely had time to kick off my shoes before I collapsed on my bed, exhaustion taking over my body. Knowing how important saving those babies was to the welfare of the ranch was comforting, and with that thought in mind I rolled over and was asleep in a matter of seconds.

Honorable Mention (Seventh-Grade Student)

The IX Family Brand
By Braden Whitehouse
Grenada Elementary School
Debbi Hoy, Teacher
Siskiyou County

I was sitting in class waiting for the final bell of the day. I knew that Grandpa would be waiting out in front of the school with his pickup and stock trailer. Today we were going to ride through his cows out in Quartz Valley. As I rounded the corner of the school I could see the big IX on the front of the stock trailer.

"What does 'IX' stand for?" my buddy Ty asked, looking at the front of Grandpa's trailer.

"It's I-X," I responded, "our family brand!"

After unloading the horses at the Burton Ranch, Grandpa and I set out across the fields to check on his cows. "How many cows should there be?" I asked.

"All together we should have 89 cows and 84 calves," he responded.

"No bulls?" I asked.

"No, they're at the home place, it's calving season right now," Grandpa replied.

After crossing a number of ditches and sumps and opening and closing at least a half dozen gates, we had seen all the cows. Like we always do, I count the calves and Grandpa counts the cows.

"How many did you get?" Grandpa asked as he closed the gate to the last pasture.

"Eighty-one," I responded, a little unsure of my count.

"Well good job, because I am missing three cows as well. So there are three pair missing, we will need to find them," Grandpa said.

"How are we going to do that?" I asked.

"We will need to ride through the neighbors' pastures and see if we can find the missing cows."

"Is it all right with the neighbors if we do that?" I asked.

"Sure, it happens all the time, sometimes their cows come into our pasture as well," he answered while we rode.

This didn't seem like it would be very easy I thought to myself. After all, most of Grandpa's cows look the same. They are mostly black, because they are Angus or Angus-cross. Unfortunately, most of the

neighbors' cows looked about like Grandpa's I noticed as I looked across the fence while Grandpa got off his horse to get the gate.

I already knew the answer, but I asked anyway. "How are we going to tell our cows from the neighbors'?"

"We will look for those with our brand," Grandpa said.

As we looked through one bunch of cows after another I asked Grandpa why he had the IX brand. He told me he had gotten the brand from his old friend, Emmitt Roberts. Both he and Emmitt liked the simple I and X because it was easy to identify. He explained that every rancher has to register their brand. In addition to the brand design, you have to register a location for the brand on the cow. Grandpa's IX goes on the right hip of all his cows. He says that he likes the hip because it is easy to see from a horse's back.

"So, other people could have the IX brand, but not on the right hip," I said.

"That's right. Emmitt always had the left hip and your aunt has the right rib. Someday your cows will have the IX on the right hip, if you take over my brand." I was so excited just thinking about continuing the family brand.

I noticed as I looked more closely that some cows had more than one brand. Grandpa explained that every time a cow is purchased by someone new they put their brand on the cow. Branding cows has a long history in our country. It is taken very seriously, as it is your only real way to prove ownership of a cow. Grandpa told me that there is a person called a brand inspector that checks the brand of most cows that are sold.

Most ranchers also earmark their cows to help identify them. Grandpa cuts a half moon out of each cow's ear.

After just a few tries I got pretty good at identifying which cows were Grandpa's and not the neighbors'. It didn't take nearly as long as I thought it would to find the three missing pairs and herd them back into the pasture.

As we loaded our horses back into the stock trailer I felt a sense of pride in the family brand and realized for the first time just how important it is to a cattle rancher like Grandpa, and hopefully someday, to me.