

Third Grade

Once Upon a Delicious Dream
By Guadalupe Landeros
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Colusa County

One day at the hamburger stand Lupita was eating some French fries. As she dipped her fry into the pile of bright red ketchup she started to daydream about how it was made.

She had seen lots of trucks piled high with tomatoes harvested from the grower's fields driving down the highway headed to a processing plant. Most of the tomatoes arrive at the processing plant and are weighed on a large scale while they are on the trucks. Some of the tomatoes are scooped up by a machine to be graded. Lupita thought, "I hope they earn an A!"

Lupita watched to see how they were graded. First, the inspectors looked for worms, mold, good color, and things that don't belong with the tomatoes, like leaves, rocks, and sticks. Sometimes things like watermelons sneak in with the tomatoes. The tomatoes are dropped off so the trucks can go back to the fields to pick up more tomatoes. The trucks whizzed by so fast that they blew her hair across her face. "Yikes!" thought Lupita.

When the tomatoes are unloaded they go down a water slide. "Whee! This is fun," said the little tomatoes. Lupita wanted to splash down the waterslide too! They whirled around the waterslide while a camera took pictures of them and looked for bad tomatoes. As they slid in the water, combs swept through the tomatoes and took out any vines or leaves they could reach.

By the time the tomatoes reached the bottom they were clean and shiny from their waterslide. The water goes into a big pond to be reused. "That's good for the planet because it does not waste a lot of water," thought Lupita.

Now that the tomatoes are clean they are cooked at a really hot temperature. They are pushed through screens to take off the skin and take out the seeds. The skins are taken to a farm and fed to pigs. The machine that fills the truck with the skins is like a robot and a person moves it around like a video game. "I'd like to spill some on my teacher's head because she gave me too much homework," thought Lupita, "but she would get really mad!"

After the tomato skins and seeds are removed, the tomato paste has to be cooled down so it can be packed for shipping. A machine cools down the tomato paste instantly by using cool water and a vacuum to suck out the heat. The water is really hot after that so the water goes around a pond to cool off again so it can be reused. Lupita thought, "it would be funny to push my brother, Tony, into the pond because he took some of my French fries!"

Once the paste is cool it gushes through big metal pipes to the packing warehouse. It goes through the pipes into plastic lined bins. The huge, hard plastic bins are filled with 300 gallons of fresh tomato paste. Each bin is sealed so air cannot get in and spoil the paste. "Wow! That is going to make a lot of ketchup for my fries," thought Lupita.

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The filled bins are stacked by people driving forklifts while they wait for the delivery trucks. When the trucks are loaded they take the tomato paste to other companies that make things like ketchup or pizza sauce. "Yum, tomatoes make delicious foods!" thought Lupita.

"Finish eating your French fries Lupita because we are all done and ready to go," said Lupita's mom. Lupita's mind came back to her family and her dinner. "OK, OK, I am finished," answered Lupita. She devoured one last bite dripping in red delicious ketchup and went home with her family.

Fourth Grade

The Journey of Robby Raindrop
By Morgan Overholtzer
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One sunny day in August, Robby the raindrop was floating along on a cloud with his friends. They were on their way to take water to the dry Central Valley in California. Suddenly the wind started to blow and the cloud got heavier and darker. Robby looked down and said, "I see a lot of peach and almond orchards. There is a lot of hay and gardens growing. It looks like they need a lot of water to grow their food. I think I'll jump off here!" So down, down, down Robby fell, passing other clouds and raindrops.

He finally landed on the roof of a house, "Splat," and slid off the edge of a roof top. Robby was dumped right into a garden where he landed on a leaf. Robby the raindrop blinked his eyes and looked around and saw squash, carrots, and cucumbers growing in the garden. When he jumped off of the leaf to look around, he realized that the soil around the plants was very dry. Robby knew the soil needed him because he could put moisture into the ground to help plants grow. But, he really didn't realize just how much the soil needed him.

"Help, help," said Robby. "This ground is soaking me up."

He watched as the plant's roots took him in and he started on a journey through the plant's stems until he popped right out of the leaves again. As he was glistening on top of the plant's leaf, he watched sprinklers running. Sprinklers are used to bring up water from the wells deep in the ground to keep the grass healthy and green.

Pretty soon he heard a bubbling noise and looked under the fence to see what it was. The neighbor was irrigating his field, and water was gurgling out of an irrigation ditch to keep the almond trees alive. Water was spreading out over the field for as far as he could see! He knew the farmers of California depend on the snow in the winter. When it melts it fills the dams and comes rushing down the canals during the spring and summer to all the farms.

As he was wondering where to go next, Robby heard a loud "moooo" noise that made him jump! He carefully looked around until he saw a big black and white animal. It was chewing grass and slurping up water. That thing must be a cow, Robby thought. Of course they need a lot of water to make milk! "Wow, they sure are big, beautiful animals," said Robby.

As he turned to go, he slipped and slid down into the gutter by the road. There was so much water gushing down, that he couldn't get his balance. As he zoomed along, he passed the orchard full of trees and the field full of cows. He slid on down the road and fell into the big gutter grate. It was dark and slimy in the pipe that Robby fell into. Soon he was dumped out again, and this time into a river!

As Robby floated along he saw so many interesting things. He passed a family having a picnic by the river and saw the children playing in the water. As he floated on, he watched cows and horses drink water from the river's edge. He also saw bikers and joggers with water bottles, drinking water as they stopped for a rest. People are made up of about 60 percent water, so they need to drink a lot of water every day to keep their bodies hydrated. As Robby the raindrop floated by the big beautiful farms, he realized that everyone was using water!

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Wow, I am really important, he thought. Without water like me, plants, animals, and people would not be able to live! So Robby laid his head back and closed his eyes with a happy smile on his face and floated on his way for many miles. It was late in the day when he noticed that the air was changing and he could hear seagulls calling. "I've arrived at the ocean!" Robby exclaimed. He was so excited to be able to float on the ocean waves, but he also knew that he would soon start a new journey. A new water cycle journey, where Robby the raindrop would swiftly evaporate and deliver water again to all living things!

Fifth Grade

The Coyote, the Avocado and Sam
By Zeb Soyffer
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One day a little boy named Sam was out by some avocado trees thinking of how yummy they always taste and decided to climb up and pick some for himself. Avocados were Sam's absolute favorite fruit. While he was up in the tree a very large and hungry looking coyote appeared by the trunk of the tree. Sam grew frightened as he knew coyotes often ate animals, and sometimes even people! The coyote asked the boy to come down and play, but Sam knew what he was up to and said, "No way, I know what you want."

Just then Sam had an idea. He told the coyote of the many health and beauty benefits the avocado has including providing 4 percent of the recommended daily allowance of vitamin C in just one avocado. He also explained how they can improve your skin and give your hair—or in the coyote's case, fur—a beautiful silky shine.

While up in the tree, Sam dropped down a tasty snack he had prepared of avocado with a squirt of lemon, topped with a dash of salt and pepper and said to the coyote, "Just try it and see what you think." To the coyote's surprise, it was delicious. He quickly finished it and asked for more.

Sam ended up giving him a dozen or so more of the delicious fruit along with some recipes he said he should try. The coyote's stomach was so full that Sam finally felt safe enough to come down. He told the coyote he could grow them himself and gave him the seeds from the avocados he had eaten and told him how to do it.

One way is to put the pit in a glass of water with a toothpick sticking out of each side so that it doesn't go into the water all the way. Once the avocado pit begins to sprout it should be put into the ground to grow. Or, if he wanted he could start it in a pot like you would any other type of plant.

He explained that the avocado tree loves plenty of sunshine and a good soak of water, but it's a good idea to let it dry out in between waterings. Sam then told the coyote all about the benefits of being a vegetarian and that the avocado was a perfect food in every way.

The large coyote headed home feeling great, without the usual heaviness he always had after a meal of meat. He felt light and full of energy as he carried a bag full of avocados on his back.

When he entered his cave, his fellow pack of coyotes were mad because he came in without the usual meal of meat. They all stood up and started barking and howling at him in anger.

They were all used to eating small animals, roadkill or anything heavy and meaty, but before they could howl any longer, the large coyote whipped up some guacamole he learned how to make from Sam.

The coyote then watched with delight as his pack of coyotes danced around with joy at the yummy, filling, and tasty treat. They asked where in the world did he find this incredible food and the coyote said from a boy he almost ate!

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He then went on to share with them how he intended to grow them with the seeds he had. A few years went by and this former hungry pack of coyotes sent word to the boy Sam to come to their cave for a feast of fresh avocados grown in their very own garden.

When Sam arrived he was in shock at the rows and rows of avocados he saw and immediately thought of how much money they could make if they sold them to the local markets. It turns out that they had so many avocados from their harvest that not only did they make a lot of money, but they wound up buying a bunch of land and growing more than 100 avocado trees.

Before too long they were the most famous avocado growers in the whole state of California and people came from all over the country to go to this special orchard, not only because the avocados were so delicious and full of vitamins but also because they were grown by vegetarian coyotes! Sam was happy because he knew animals and people would no longer be hunted by coyotes and because he could climb trees all day long without worry!

Sixth Grade

Just Peachy
By Nick O'Brien
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Judee Sani, Teacher
Stanislaus County

When I was a young peach, my dad was the president of our orchard in Modesto, California. Our orchard was the best in the fruit nation. With the bees flying all over the place shouting and bossing all the bugs around, the orchard was busy and beautiful.

My best friend was another peach five branches up. His name was Johnson and our favorite game was Jump-Branch. Jump-Branch is a game when one peach swings the branch back and forth while the other peach leaps over the branch. It is kind of like jump rope with a branch. My name is Sims and my friend Johnson and I were both Clingstones, which makes sense. The two of us were inseparable, very clingy, and did everything together the whole summer.

Our school, California Gold Elementary, was located on the second branch. Mrs. Freestone was our teacher and she had bright red fuzz and a bruise on her rear. I always liked Mrs. Freestone; she was sweet. Even though some of us were not Freestones like her, she still treated all of the peaches equally. Clingstones were not as popular as the Freestones, but she did not care and taught all of us not to judge a peach by its skin. She never bruised our egos.

Our next branch neighbor was this old peach named Ms. Faye Elberta and was she ever mean! She thought she was better than everyone because she was a part of the Freestone family and her brand of peach was popular with the eaters. Ms. Elberta was always peeking through the leaves on the tree at my friends and me while we played. Every time we really started having fun, she would make rustling noises in the leaves and then spray us with peach juice. She had a fit when she saw us swinging on the branches kicking up peach fuzz.

Two trees away there was a very special peach named Redhaven. She had the best sunlight in the whole field perched high on the tree and all of the peaches talked about how sweet and perfect she must be soaking all of that sun up every day. My friends and I all dreamed about Redhaven.

At the end of the California summer, we saw men picking peaches off the branches. After four days of watching the workers picking peaches, they soon were one tree away from our tree. When the men came to our tree, I was hoping that they wouldn't pick anybody I knew. They picked me and everybody else. No one knew where we were going. The workers placed us all into a box, then into a truck, and finally into a factory. We were instructed to all participate in a runway fashion show where we would all parade down the runway belt and hopefully get chosen for the "big show."

Worried that no one would want me, I was very happy when a lady came over and picked me. She placed me in a special pile going to the farmers market. Not all of us got to go to the farmers market, some of my family headed to grocery stores and others to a can of cling peaches. I saw mean old Ms. Elberta going down the fruit cocktail chutes. It was sad saying goodbye to everyone and I shed some tears of juice.

My dreams came true the next day. My mom and dad ended up at the farmers market with me. Rolling out of the giant plastic bin with loads of other peaches, I landed right next to Redhaven! Not only was she sweet on the

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inside, but also on the outside. We chatted for days until a happy little girl picked me and bought me. After shining me up, she took a big bite out of me and was delighted. Enjoying every bite, the girl talked her mom into letting her plant the peach seed in her backyard. Now I am in the ground waiting to grow into a peach tree. See you this spring!

Seventh Grade

From Dirt to Pie Crusts
By Delaney Black
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BEEP!! BEEP!! BEEP!! The alarm goes off and two minutes later Dad comes in.

"Get up and get dressed," Dad says as he walks out. 6:45 a.m., I rub my eyes groaning, I want to stay in bed. I get up and get ready, trying to wake myself up while getting dressed.

"Hurry up and eat," Dad says. I finish eating while walking out the door promptly at 7:00 a.m. My job is to irrigate the wheat and alfalfa by moving wheelines on our family farm. I live on a farm that grows organic alfalfa and wheat. We irrigate the wheat until the middle of July. I hurry out to the 4-wheeler and head to the fields with the cool morning air and mosquitoes hitting my face. Every morning, sometimes mid-day, and night, I change water on our family farm.

I turn off the first pipe; wait for it to drain while turning off the others. I move the first, and then walk to the second, and so on. Lastly, I hook them back up and start them. I get nervous while turning on the wheelines because that is when something will go wrong. As the wheeline fills and the water pressure increases, a riser can blow or a pipe latch can unhook. The result is a mushroom cloud of water blowing up in the air, Dad driving across the field towards me at 40 miles an hour, and 30 more minutes of work. I know because I have made that mistake before!

Later in the day I go out again and start the same process all over again. The humid heat is torture during the day and I feel like my clothes are wet from sweat. It is so hot that I get really frustrated while hooking the old pipes up and I just can't wait to be done! It feels great to be sprayed by the cold sprinklers after they have filled and there are no problems. After dinner I go out and change wheelines for the third time of the day. But, this time I go out and help irrigate other fields.

Wheat needs to be irrigated until the middle of July. I love watching the wheat turn from green to brown. When the wheat heads fill and the crop starts to turn brown, Dad says, "We don't have to irrigate the field anymore." It's pretty tough. My uncle and dad harvest the wheat in the middle of August and put it in our granary for storage.

We grind the wheat we store into flour and sell it to bakeries and the local community. I help my dad run the wheat through the cleaner and I sit in there sometimes when he grinds the wheat into flour. The cleaner is a machine that separates the wheat seed from other seeds, small pieces of straw and wheat hulls.

My favorite part though, is when we take some flour and I help my mom bake pies and bread. I love the homemade bread! Cinnamon bread is the best, it's so good it makes my mouth water just thinking about it. On our farm we enjoy watching the wheat grow from seeds planted in the dirt to pie crust that melts in our mouths.

Eighth Grade

The Guard Llama: To Protect and Serve
By Matt Wright
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Stanislaus County

These days, coyotes are hungry and they love themselves a helping of sheep. That's where I come in! Call me Guard Llama, that's my nickname, but my real name is Elliot Gawksalot. In case you don't know, I'm the defender of the sheep, a loyal soldier to the farmer, here to protect and serve the citizens of Double H Ranch.

All over California, guard llamas like me have been employed for the same reason, to protect the sheep at all costs. This ground-breaking achievement has helped farmers all around the state have better livestock profits with even fewer predators killed.

Enough with the information, let's get down to business. I do a perimeter check every hour on the hour, just to make sure the citizens are safe and out of harm's way. When I do encounter a predator threatening the livelihood of my citizens, I act fast with my special combat skills: screeching to disorient them, spitting to blind them, and kicking to just plain old get rid of them. So far, my tactics have worked. The coyotes have been scared away, not even getting a whiff of my sheep. Well, all except one, Ace Bandit, the slyest, most evil coyote you have ever seen.

Ace Bandit and I go way back. We have been rivals ever since we first met, and now he threatens my sheep. He has one advantage, as I see it, and that is he never travels in a pack. The ragged carnivore always finds a way to get in the fence, always! I must find a way to get rid of him. Or else the farmer will get rid of me! I won't let that happen. So let's do this. Bring all you've got Ace! You'll need it.

I heard him last night howling and he usually does that the night before he strikes. I have a plan. I have ordered all sheep to the middle of the pasture and I will guard the perimeter. It's time to bring Ace down! This will be an even fight: Guard Llama vs. Ace Bandit.

Tonight I will make the farmer proud. I even made up my own catch phrase: "It's the eye of the llama. It's the thrill of the fight, rising up to the challenge of Ace Bandit." I have also rehearsed my combat tactics. First, I'll humiliate him in front of all the sheep. Then, we'll fight for a while, and finally, once I have won, I'll herd him to the state line. Yeah, Nevada sounds good. He can melt in the desert, for all I care.

Okay, it is dark now. I hear barking. The time has finally come for me to destroy Ace. There he is! Kick, spit, and scream! Kick, spit, and scream! This isn't going as I planned! He isn't snarling anymore, what happened? The sheep have made a circle around us now. Is he dead? "I knocked him out," said a familiar voice. "Let's get him on his way before he wakes up." We took him to the highway and put him on the back of a truck going to Nevada. I'm glad that's over with, I thought to myself.

When I got back to the pasture, I was surprised by the congratulatory party for me thrown by the farmer and the citizens. I talked with all of the sheep and before they went to bed, they thanked me for protecting them and I discovered that knocking out Ace was their way of returning the favor. In the long run, you get what you give, and you should always treat others the way you want to be treated. I guess it just comes to me naturally.

