

Third Grade

The Pink Shirt
By Rose Velasquez
McSwain Elementary School
Denise Van Horn, Teacher
Merced County

Hi. I'm Jimmy Cotton Plant, or I should say I used to be a cotton plant. Now, I'm even better.

It all started in a field in Atwater, California, where I was planted in rich soil. My farmer took great care of me and, as the months passed, I became a mature cotton plant. I grew flowers that turned into bolls and once the bolls opened, I was cotton!

Then one day a giant machine came towards me and picked me up. All the other cotton plants were crying and yelling for help, but I was so terrified I couldn't make a sound. We were taken to a factory. My parents had told me about this place. They said, "Sonny boy, someday you, too, will go to a factory."

At the factory we were transformed: bathed, pulled apart, combed, and made into a rectangular prism. Then it was time to be dyed.

First, they showed me green. I didn't like green because it reminds me of my late friend, Jalapeño.

Next, they showed me orange, but I didn't like that either. Too much like my old friend, Pumpkin, who moved away.

And then, there it was, the perfect color: PINK! "Wow, I guess I love pink. I'm goin' in." I was pink-a-fied!

Later, they turned me into cloth, sewed pockets on me, and put sparkles in the shape of a heart on my front.

I was loaded into a truck and taken to a store where I hung out for a while. One morning a family came in and took me off the hanger. Ahh, that felt good.

They took me to their home where I now live happily in the closet of a little girl who just loves her special pink shirt.

Fourth Grade

The Incident
By Evan Johns
Gratton Elementary School
Pennie Segna, Teacher
Stanislaus County

One snowy day, in the mountains surrounding the San Joaquin Valley, there was a ranch named Pacar Farms. The family started the farm by cattle ranching many years ago.

On this day Billy woke up at 4:00 in the morning. He got out of bed and was going to make himself some breakfast, then go to the barn and feed the cows. But, before he was ready to leave, he heard his dad's phone ring. His dad answered the phone. It sounded like he was talking to one of his workers and looked very upset. When he got off the phone he told Billy that it was Erick.

Erick had told him that he had seen some of Pacar Farms' cows trotting out in a newly planted field!

"What are the cows doing out of their pasture?" asked Billy. "We have to hurry and get the cows out of the field! Should we call Jim to help us?"

As Billy's dad went to call Jim, Billy went to feed the cows that hadn't escaped. While Billy was feeding, he kept wondering how the cows got out of their pasture.

A while later Erick showed up with some cows in the trailer.

"The cows look pretty cut up from going through some loose barbed wire," said Erick.

As Erick and Jim herded the cows into the ranch's corral, Billy noticed some cows were cut and bleeding. He asked his dad if he should call their veterinarian, Dr. Smith. His dad thought that was a good idea.

When Dr. Smith arrived, they started herding cows through the cattle chute to a cattle squeeze so the vet could clean and stitch up the deep cuts. The cattle squeeze helps gently hold cows so the rancher can take care of them. Dr. Smith then guided Billy on how to take care of the hurt animals. First they made sure they had plenty of water to drink and enough room to lie down and rest because the cattle seemed to be very stressed from the whole incident. He also gave them an ointment to put on the cows' cuts to keep them from getting infected. As a veterinarian, it is Dr. Smith's job to not only help when animals are hurt or sick, but also help calm the owners down and teach them what to do when crises happen. Billy was grateful for all of Dr. Smith's advice.

As the last cows were being doctored, Billy asked his dad if he could go check the fence line. His dad agreed, so Billy went to get his quad. He put on his helmet and headed to the pasture. When he was driving on the dirt road he noticed that there was a trail that went deep into the woods. He decided to get off his quad and see where the trail led. He was astonished to see there were hoof prints in the dirt. Then Billy decided to follow the tracks. As he went along the trail he saw a little red spot way down the trail. He sprinted down the trail thinking to himself, I can be an investigator! As he got closer he saw a red truck. Right when he saw the red truck he remembered that he had read an article in the newspaper that said there were rustlers who illegally go onto private property and steal cattle.

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He thought he should go tell his dad, so Billy sprinted back to his quad and rode back home as quickly as possible. When he got home he told his dad what he saw. Billy's dad was furious and decided he should call the sheriff to arrest the rustlers.

Billy and his dad went to check the fence line together to see how the cows received their cuts. They found a section that was cut and other sections that were low where the cows must have tried to escape from the rustlers. Together they mended the fence. When they finished, both were exhausted. As they walked to the house, Billy's dad's phone rang. When he got off the phone he told Billy the sheriff wanted to thank him for finding the rustlers and to tell him that they were going to be behind bars for a long time.

After such an eventful day, Billy and his dad talked about the many people farmers are grateful for—people like veterinarians and sheriffs that help keep the ranches safe and sound.

Fifth Grade

Luigi's Pride
By Jake Martin
Sacred Heart Catholic School
Star Pedron, Teacher
Stanislaus County

Morning comes early on the farm. Luigi woke up and stretched his tires. When farmer Bill opened the barn door, Luigi's engine roared to life. His blue paint gleamed as he drove into the morning sun. Today was going to be a busy day.

Farmer Bill helped Luigi hook up the disc and off they went.

"What are we working on today?" Luigi asked.

"We have to get the field ready for planting."

"So what are we planting, Farmer Bill?"

"We are planting corn this time." Farmer Bill said.

Luigi's engine raced. Luigi loved corn. He worked hard all day discing, leveling, and laying furrows. By the end of the day, he was tired and dusty. He moved slowly into the barn to rest. It had been a good day.

The next morning Luigi was ready when Farmer Bill reached the barn. When Farmer Bill opened the barn door, Luigi raced outside to connect the seed planter. Planting the seeds was one of Luigi's favorite parts of farming. He hooked up the planter while Farmer Bill poured in the seeds. When they were ready they headed back to the field.

Back and forth Luigi drove, slowly working his way across the field. The whole time he worked, he talked. He talked to the seeds. He told them how delicious corn is. He told them how corn can be turned into fuel for tractors and cars. He told them how they would be ready to harvest in about 100 days. Luigi knew a lot about corn and he shared it all with the seeds. He could've talked all night, but his work was done. He told the seeds "goodnight" and went off to the barn to rest.

The sun was hot, really hot. Luigi could feel the heat cooking his tires as he drove by the newly planted corn. Suddenly he heard a pop. Then he heard another and another. Soon the air was filled with the sound of popping. He spun around looking for the noise. He watched in horror as his field became a growing blanket of white popcorn. Luigi woke with a start.

He raced out to see if his precious corn was okay. Getting to the field, he saw that it was just a dream. His corn was fine. It was better than fine. Tiny seedlings were sprouting all over the field. Luigi's heart glowed with joy as the warm sun rose over his new tiny friends. Farmer Bill came out and stood next to Luigi admiring the new tiny plants.

"We should probably get these guys a drink," Farmer Bill said.

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The next couple of weeks passed uneventfully until the weeds attacked. Suddenly they were there. They were everywhere choking out the new corn, stealing the precious water, and robbing the tiny plants of their sun. They had to go. Luigi rumbled back to the barn to hitch up the cultivator. He was not going to let any old weeds choke out his corn.

Luigi watched with pride as more weeks passed and his corn grew. Finally it was harvest time. His corn was grown and mature. Farmer Bill came to the field to talk to Luigi.

"You've done a great job, Luigi."

"Thanks Farmer Bill. Should I go get the harvester?"

"Yes, I think it's time."

Sixth Grade

Branding Day on Our Ranch
By Creed Newton
Scott Valley Jr. High School
Tracy Dickinson, Teacher
Siskiyou County

It's January in Scott Valley and the weather is cold, but dry and sunny. Our cows are bred to have their calves from October through December and calving season is over. Now it is time for branding.

My brother, sister, and I are the fourth generation to work on our family ranch. We help irrigate, fix fences, and work cows. I am just learning how to drive the tractor to help drag fields this spring, but the most fun chore of them all is branding calves. I was so excited the day Grandma checked the weather and said, "Looks like we can brand on Saturday. Let's git 'er done."

My grandma and dad like to do things the traditional way when possible, so we still rope our calves instead of using a squeeze or calf table. Branding day can be hard work, but in Scott Valley we have lots of family, friends, and neighbors who come to help get the work done. Having lots of help makes the day easier and more fun.

Grandma and Mom start cooking a couple days ahead because we have a big crew to feed after branding. This year we are having tri tip, beans, salad, bread, and dessert. Dad will cut some juniper wood for the branding fire. We use juniper because it burns clean and hot and keeps the branding irons just right.

The day before, we get the branding irons, vaccine guns, and everything else we will need, ready. My job this year is to earmark each and every ear, so I make sure my knife is sharp. I have a special knife that I found up at Ruffy Lake in the mountains about three years ago and it has a perfect blade for ear marking.

The next morning we wake up early for the big day and the weather is good. We get the cattle gathered and sort the cows off the calves. The branding fire is started to get the irons hot and the vaccine guns are ready. Then pickups and stock trailers start pulling in with ropers and their horses.

We put 10 calves at a time into the branding pen. Then ropers head and heel them. After each calf is roped, the ground crew puts the ropes on the front and back legs and they are pulled tight between two horses. Our calves are branded and earmarked on the left side, so the crew makes sure the left side is up when the calf is on the ground. I come in and cut the earmark on the left ear of each calf in the shape of an upside down L. Others come in and castrate or neuter the bull calves then vaccinate and brand each calf.

Brands are a legal identification of cattle and are put on a calf with a hot branding iron which forms a scar in the shape of the brand. Each ranch has its own brand and location that it is put on a calf, such as on the rib or hip. Our brand is a J-P on the left rib; it was my great-grandpa's brand. Earmarks are a notch we cut in a calf's ear in a certain way and are also a way we identify our cattle from someone else's cattle.

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Each calf gets three shots. The first one protects them from red water, black leg, and other diseases. The next shot protects the calves from pneumonia and other stress-related diseases. The last shot helps keep them healthy. Our family is very careful about giving the shots in the right places and treating the cattle as quietly and calmly as possible.

After each group of calves is finished being worked we turn them out with the cows. Each cow finds its calf and heads across the pasture and the calves calm down quickly.

During the branding, some younger kids spray disinfectant on the castrated bulls, which are now steers. Others collect the mountain oysters in a bucket. My friend James is a good mountain oyster cook. He hangs them on the branding barrel and cooks them to perfection! My dad says that anyone who hasn't tasted mountain oysters is missing out on a good snack.

When the last calf is turned out to its mama, it is time to relax, eat, and play.

Seventh Grade

Strawberry Troublemakers
By Allyson Wei
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Clarence Atwater, Teacher
Los Angeles County

My name is Harper and I live on a commercial strawberry farm in California with my dad and my little sister, Jillian. Commercial farms are plantations that grow crops mainly to sell. My family is not the only one that lives on the farm. We have many workers that help grow our crops. It's good for them because they get work and are paid for it. Also it's good for us because we get help picking and taking care of all our strawberries!

I have always loved strawberry-picking season. We harvest in the winter when the strawberries are lush and ripe. To pick strawberries, first, you choose a strawberry that has a juicy red color. Next, grab the stem just above the berry and pull. Then, place the strawberry carefully into a container until you can put them in a storage house. The temperature in our storage house is about 32°F to 35°F. After that we package them by pint or quart containers and cover them with a plastic film to protect the strawberries inside. Finally, we ship them off into the world.

Our family loves to eat strawberries. Strawberries on pancakes, strawberries in salad, and strawberries on dessert! Once I even asked Dad if I could get sick from eating so many strawberries. He just laughed and said, "Of course not! Strawberries have plenty of vitamin C; it boosts your fiber, and helps you fight problems such as cancer and arthritis!"

One day, as Jillian and I were goofing around in the strawberry fields, Jillian shrieked. I quickly ran over to her, hoping that she wasn't hurt. But all I saw were a bunch of little brown bugs crawling all over the strawberries.

"What are those?" I cried out.

"I don't know! We should tell Dad," Jillian replied. Then we sprinted home to inform our dad.

That day during lunch we talked about it.

"So you found a bug," Dad said as he plopped a strawberry into his mouth. "Did it hurt you?"

"No," Jillian replied, "but it might have hurt the strawberries."

"Dad, do you think the strawberries are damaged?" I asked, worried about them.

Dad used to be an exterminator, but when he found out we could buy this farm, his eyes lit up. Then he gathered all our life-savings and bought it. If our strawberries died, not only would we be wrecked, but also all our workers would be out of a job and would have to find work elsewhere.

"I don't know for sure, but we can check it out right now," Dad responded, standing up and putting on his coat.

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Jillian and I followed him outside and took a look at a few strawberries. "Look at all these bugs!" Jillian cried out, pointing at multiple strawberry plants.

"Oh no," Dad muttered.

"What is it dad?" I asked, now extremely concerned. What if all our strawberries died? What would happen if we lost everything?

"Those are lygus bugs," Dad answered, hanging his head down and rubbing his forehead.

"What do they do?" Jillian asked, with a fretful sound in her voice.

"Well, lygus bugs damage strawberries by poking into the seeds and sucking out all of its juice. The lygus bugs will make our strawberries irregularly shaped and unusable to sell."

"Unless we get rid of them!" I remarked trying to bring his spirits up.

"True, but it'll take a lot of patience and work..." Dad replied, starting to look more cheerful, "Would you be willing to help?"

"Sure!" Jillian and I said spontaneously. We would do anything for our dad and our farm.

Later that day, Dad, Jillian, the workers, and I sprayed Pyrethrum on the plants. Pyrethrum is an insecticide spray made from chrysanthemums. It's toxic for the insects, but not for us. We sprayed the strawberry plants every 2 to 3 days, making sure we killed all the lygus bugs.

It was hard work because we needed to spray every plant possible, so no bug survived. In the end, all the lygus bugs were gone, and only a few strawberries were damaged. So our strawberry farm survived and everything went back to normal. But, if we hadn't been able to control the bugs, all our workers would be out of jobs and we would have to start all over. So I'm glad we stopped the insects before a strawberry catastrophe happened!

Eighth Grade

Raineo and Dropulete
By Morgan Hicks
Gratton Elementary School
Steve Merchant, Teacher
Stanislaus County

"Dropulete! What's happening? Why am I gaining so much weight?!" yelled Raineo.

"It's okay Raineo!" informed Dropulete. Dropulete knew what was happening because her mother explained that water vapor in the air condenses and forms big water drops. The water cycle is a cloudy subject between Raineo and his family.

"AAWWW!" they yelled as they fell down. If this was going to be the end, Dropulete was glad to be with her dear Raineo. Raineo reached Dropulete, but her wet hand slipped out of his grasp. The trees and buildings that were far away looked as if they were growing bigger and bigger with every second.

As they were falling, Raineo was thinking about what had happened a few days earlier. Raineo and Dropulete had stormed off together to a secluded cloud, despite their families' differences, because they were in love. Their families were as unpredictable as the weather. Raineo's family believed the amount of water on Earth never changes, just moves from place to place in different forms. Dropulete's family believed that new water appears every day from the ground and disappears forever when consumed. Dropulete knew Raineo's family was right and her family would never let her be with him, so they thundered off together.

Splat! They hit the ground hard. Raineo was sliding downhill when he noticed Dropulete was nowhere to be found. Raineo found himself with thousands of other raindrops. This must be the Stanislaus River that Dropulete was talking about, the one that runs down the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Where was Dropulete? Last time he saw her crystal blue eyes was right before they hit the other water drops. Raineo wasn't that worried about Dropulete, because he remembered his father's words about the constant amount of water on Earth. He knew that Dropulete was out there somewhere...

After his trip down the Stanislaus River, Raineo spilled into New Melones Lake. Then he was sucked up through a drainage pipe and entered a canal. Next, he was flooded into an orchard in Stockton with young peach trees. This kind of irrigation is called surface irrigation. He met another hundred raindrops and asked if they knew where his dearest Dropulete was. Then 70 of them were absorbed by a tree and were gone. Soon after, 30 of them, including Raineo, evaporated into the sky.

Raineo was so busy thinking about Dropulete that he didn't even realize he had evaporated and was back into the clouds, falling again. This time he fell into the San Joaquin River and entered another canal. This time he went through tiny tubes and was shot out of a spinning nozzle. This kind of irrigation involves sprinklers. He met another hundred raindrops and asked them about Dropulete. But 80 of them hit a plant root and were sucked in. Raineo and the other 20 evaporated into the sky.

As soon as Raineo was in the cloud he was falling again. This time he landed in the Merced River. The Merced River leads into the San Joaquin River. Once more he was in a canal going through a very tiny tube, then drop by drop, he landed on the ground. This type of irrigation was called micro irrigation.

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Raineo again met another hundred drops and tried to ask them if they had seen Dropulete, but 90 of them had already been sucked up by the tree. Finally, he saw her coming out of the drip line. He rushed frantically to her side and held his beloved Dropulete, but suddenly they started to evaporate again! Raineo tried to hang on to Dropulete because he knew how much his heart ached without her and he couldn't afford to lose her again, but she was already gone.

When Raineo got back on a cloud, he searched frantically for Dropulete, with little hope they would ever see each other again. Then he heard Dropulete's voice. "Raineo, Raineo, wherefore art thou Raineo?"

He saw her and ran to his dearest Dropulete. They were ecstatic to have each other once more.

Dropulete's family was so despondent that she had left; they admitted they were wrong and Raineo's family was right. The families finally agreed and Raineo and Dropulete were allowed to marry. While they made many more trips through the water cycle, they made them hand in hand together forever.

Honorable Mention (Seventh-Grade Student)

The Lone Calf
By Olivia Hanna
Scott Valley Jr. High School
Jennifer Gomes and Amy Hurlimann, Teachers
Siskiyou County

I hopped in the old pickup truck where my dad was waiting for me. We headed out to the feedlot where the old gate was squeaking, the wooden fence was smooth from cows rubbing on it, and heifers were waiting to be fed.

When we got to the feedlot, there were calves jumping and running all around, happy to be in the real world. My dad and I had just started feeding when he suddenly yelled, "Stop the truck. There is a new calf ahead."

As I pushed in the clutch and hit the brake, we came to an abrupt stop. I stumbled out of the pickup asking my dad where it was. He pointed to a small heap of black and said, "Its mother must've had twins and left one behind. We'll have to care for it until it's old enough to be on its own."

Even though there are lots of calves without mothers, I couldn't help but feel sorry for this particular one when she looked up at me, helpless with her big brown eyes sparkling like diamonds. My dad jumped in the truck after lifting the new calf I named Diamond onto the back of the truck with me. I held onto her for the seemingly long drive to the pen where we keep motherless and sick calves.

When we finally got there, he lifted Diamond from the truck and carried the small calf to the pen. He set her down and I made a bed of straw in the corner for her. As my dad and I left, I saw her walk over and settle down in the pile of straw I set out for her.

I came back that same night to give her a bottle of calf formula. I mixed the powdered milk with some hot water and shook the bottle. I took it out to her, and she drank it as if she hadn't eaten for an eternity. When she finished the bottle I took it inside and said one last good-bye for the day.

After one month of calling Diamond to the fence twice a day to bottle feed her, something we knew might happen, did; another calf died. My dad skinned the calf and put the hide on Diamond. The heifer of the dead calf took Diamond in thinking it was her calf. We left the hide on Diamond for about three days and then took it off. The scent was now permanently a part of Diamond and the mother cow accepted the calf as her own. She then had fresh milk every day for about seven months until she started eating hay. The month I spent with her was over quickly, but with the extra care my dad and I gave her she was able to thrive.

Over the years I continued feeding cows with my dad. One time I called for Diamond. I never expected her to come since I was only with her a month, but a beautiful, unmistakable heifer named Diamond walked over and looked up at me with sparkling eyes. Beside her I saw a small calf looking straight at me with eyes just like her mother's.

Honorable Mention (Sixth-Grade Student)

BJ's Mountain Trip
By Calvin Thackeray
Scott Valley Jr. High School
Tracy Dickinson, Teacher
Siskiyou County

Woo! I'm tired. We just started the climb up the mountain and I'm already plumb wore-out. Oops, sorry for not introducing myself. I'm Big Jake, BJ for short. I'm a registered American Quarter Horse, and I live on a ranch.

We're on our way to move some cows around in the Marble Mountain wilderness area for a local rancher. We are moving them around because, like people, cows will tend to be lazy, if left alone. They would stay in one place and overgraze. You don't want them to overgraze because it can cause a lot of damage to the land.

It's pretty hard to climb the mountain because I have a person on my back, and I probably need to go on a diet. It can also be pretty cold up there since the trees block the sun.

After about half a mile, our riders got back on after walking us a little. When we were about three quarters of the way there there was a really narrow part, and a straight drop-off on one end. I started to get nervous when my rider was messing around like he was trying to knock me off! It's a good thing I'm careful where I put my feet so I don't slip.

After a little while we finally arrived. We counted the cows in the meadow, and one was missing. We looked everywhere, but couldn't find it. Our owners then decided to have lunch. While I was grazing I noticed a sign on a tree. I couldn't tell what it was, but I assumed it had to do with the Forest Service. Speaking of the Forest Service, have you ever heard of a United States Forest Service Grazing Permit? You probably haven't so let me tell you about it.

The United States Forest Service Grazing Permit is a win-win situation for the local rancher and the Forest Service. The local rancher is able to graze his cows in the mountains without having to own large amounts of land down in the valleys. It is also cheaper, but he can only have a certain number of cows up in the mountains. For the Forest Service, the cows eat grasses and plants that would eventually become a fire hazard (in other words, it reduces the fuel load in the forest).

After lunch, our owners decided to keep on going and start to push the cows up a very steep hill. If our riders didn't get off and the trail didn't sidehill us horses would not have made it up, especially my friend, Flash. His rider looks about twice the size of him! To make things worse, after a little while, it started to snow. We put the cattle up here in the spring and take them out in the fall. If it's already snowing, we really need to get them out! The snow started to get really thick and it was hard to see. We finally got the cows up the hill and the people decided to have one last look for the lost cow before we pushed the rest back down.

I wondered how they were going to find it with all of this snow. I started to worry about getting home to my hay. Just then I heard a slight "clang." My ears suddenly perked up. Was that what I thought it was? I heard it again. Yes, it is what I thought it was. It is a bell. It's a good thing this local rancher puts bells on

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his cows so they don't get lost. I followed the bell sound and saw a cow hiding in some shrubs. The lost cow! I jumped into the shrubs and scared it out. The cow started mooing and ran towards the rest of the herd. Our owners, wondering what was happening, turned to look where the noise was coming from. They looked really happy and were clapping when they saw that I found the lost cow. We finally pushed the cattle down the hill and got back home. Everyone was saying I got the "Best Horse of the Day" award. "It's no big deal," I told them. "I do it all the time."

Back at the ranch the barn never felt so much like home.