

Third Grade

A Sweet Potato Water Fix
By Drew Ramirez
Gratton Elementary School
Sheila Amaral, Teacher
Stanislaus County

Grandpa Mike, Uncle J.R., and Andy live in California on a small ten-acre farm. They are growing sweet potatoes that were planted last spring. So, to conserve water, Andy talked to his grandpa and uncle about putting in a drip line.

“Drip irrigation is a way for the plant to get water directly onto the roots. It also uses less water,” Andy told his grandpa and uncle.

“No time,” replied his uncle.

“Maybe next year,” Grandpa Mike said. “Sweet potatoes are roots that grow deep in the ground. It is a good thing they have some protection because the sun is boiling hot.”

For over two weeks, the summer temperature was over 100 degrees. Taking their hats off, the three went inside for a cold drink.

“I have never seen it so hot here for so long,” Grandpa said as he took a long drink of his ice water.

“I don’t know what we’re going to do to keep these sweet potatoes alive and growing,” said Uncle J.R. “Because of the drought, our irrigation water has been reduced. We’re only going to get a third of the water we got last year.”

The family was worried the sweet potatoes were going to die.

“Why don’t we set up a drip line?” Andy said. “It’s not too late.”

“Yes, Andy, I think it’s time,” said Grandpa Mike.

The three headed to the farm supply store to buy the necessary parts to install the drip line. They bought drip tape with emitters, fittings, and stakes, along with the materials to hook it up to their water well.

The family began to work together to install the drip line.

With only a couple of hours of daylight left, they continued to work late into the night.

“We need to get this drip line in as soon as we can to save our crop,” Grandpa Mike said.

Once the drip line was installed, Andy was happy to turn the water on the following evening. It is cooler at night, and the water will be able to get to the roots of the sweet potatoes instead of being evaporated.

Andy stayed up all night making sure the drip-line system worked properly.

Grandpa Mike woke up the next morning and noticed the sweet potatoes’ leaves had perked up overnight.

The crop was harvested in mid-October.

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Uncle J.R. commented, “Looks like we were able to harvest a decent crop. Usually, we harvest 30 to 32 bins of sweet potatoes per acre, but this year, due to the drought, we were only able to harvest about 25 bins.”

“I’m just happy we have a crop to harvest,” replied Grandpa Mike.

The whole family helped with harvest. As they loaded the last of the bins on the truck to be shipped to the local packing shed, there was a feeling of relief. After the truck pulled out, three very tired people walked to the house.

At the dinner table that night, Grandpa Mike said, “Andy, Uncle J.R. and I owe you a huge thank you. That drip irrigation idea of yours saved our crop.”

Andy went to sleep that night smiling. “I love my Grandpa Mike and Uncle J.R.,” he whispered as he fell asleep.

Fourth Grade

Carrot Man Rooty Ventures into the City
By Kaiya Luevano
South Oceanside Elementary
Janette Boone and Madeline Ramirez, Teachers
San Diego County

Once upon a time, there lived a carrot from a California carrot farm that loved to explore. Carrot Man Rooty really wanted to explore New York City because he had heard how amazing it was on TV. He was very interested in seeing the Statue of Liberty, the fruit and vegetable stands, the Empire State Building, and Central Park.

One day, Carrot Man Rooty overheard the farmers talking about a shipment of carrots leaving the farm and heading to New York City. The day the truck was leaving, Carrot Man Rooty decided to sneak on the truck and head to New York City! He was so excited to be going on the adventure he had been waiting for!

When the truck arrived in New York City, Carrot Man Rooty and all of his carrot family were delivered to the fruit and vegetable stands. When he got placed onto the table, he looked up and saw a sign that said, "Farmer's Market Today at Central Park!" He couldn't believe that he was where he'd hoped he would travel to on his adventure.

At the farmer's market, a lady that sold carrots told everyone who walked by all about how healthy carrots were for them. Carrot Man Rooty learned how beta-carotene made him orange. He also learned that beta-carotene turns into Vitamin A in humans, which is good for their eyes and skin. The lady also talked about other healthy qualities such as Vitamin C, Potassium, Magnesium, and Calcium.

Carrot Man Rooty became worried he might be sold, so he decided to sneak off the table and try to find the Empire State Building. Once he found the Empire State Building, he was amazed with how big it actually was.

Just then, a huge crowd of people came, and he almost got trampled. So, he sprinted off to find the Statue of Liberty. When he was trying to find the Statue of Liberty, he spotted a street fair. Carrot Man Rooty wandered through the street fair and noticed a lot of fruit and vegetable stands.

He heard a man at one of the stands talking about how fresh his carrots were because they were California grown. The man also blurted out a different name for carrots called *Daucus carota*. Carrot Man Rooty had never been called that before!

Suddenly, Carrot Man Rooty realized he had gotten off his path to finding the Statue of Liberty. He remembered seeing subway signs close by. He searched for the correct subway train to hop aboard.

Just then, he heard the conductor yell, "All aboard! This subway train is headed to the Statue of Liberty!" He immediately jumped onto the subway train. Carrot Man Rooty couldn't believe he was going to the Statue of Liberty.

When the subway stopped, Carrot Man Rooty got out and saw the giant Statue of Liberty. He was excited to try and make it to the top. He quickly hopped on a ferry, which took him across the harbor, to the base of the statue. He started to climb one step at a time. By the third step, he became very tired and knew he'd have to come up with a new plan. He decided to jump into the backpack of a kid climbing the stairs. When he finally made it to the top, he jumped out of the kid's backpack onto the edge and looked down.

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He saw a lot of tiny figures, and it reminded him of looking down at his carrot farm with all the crops. He started to think New York City was no place for a harmless, tiny carrot. He felt very sad and wanted to go home to California.

Carrot Man Rooty remembered hearing the farmers say they were leaving to go back to California to gather more carrots. He decided to race back to the farmer's market and try to make the truck ride home.

Carrot Man Rooty knew that he would have to move quickly. Down the 500 steps, through the crowd, across the harbor on the ferry, onto the subway, past the Empire State Building, through Central Park and onto the truck he leaped! He couldn't believe he made it in time to head home from his big adventure.

When he was home, Carrot Man Rooty thought back to how crazy his adventure was. Now, he knew that New York City was no place for a carrot. He decided to turn on the TV to relax. Just then, he saw a program about China. He thought to himself, "Maybe China is a better place for an adventure for a harmless, tiny carrot."

Fifth Grade

Healing Kiwifruit

By Chloe Um

Fred Ekstand Elementary School

Jeff Miedema, Teacher

Los Angeles County

Once upon a time, in a small and poor village, there was a small boy named Ellis. He loved drawing pictures and wished to have a paint brush. “Oh, how I wish to have a paint brush...”

Although he had no paint brush to paint with, he didn’t stop drawing. He always took a sharp stick and drew on smooth dirt. He was so good at drawing and everything he drew seemed to come alive! Ellis saw butterflies and flowers dancing around him.

One day, he fell asleep while he was drawing an angel. A real angel appeared to Ellis and gave him a beautiful brush and said, “Ellis, use this brush wisely.” He then woke up and was so surprised to see the beautiful brush from his dream. He was so happy to have the brush.

He then went to a quiet place and drew a plate of cheese and, suddenly, it became real. He then drew a mouse with the brush, and the mouse became alive, took the cheese, and ran away from him.

Ellis was very confused and remembered what the angel had said, “Use the brush wisely.” While he was thinking about what had just happened, he saw a little girl running without shoes. Ellis quickly drew pretty shoes, so the girl could wear them. She left happily with the shoes.

The day after, Ellis went down to the village and saw people having a hard time with skin problems. Most of the villagers had skin problems because of their malnutrition and lack of vitamins in their bodies. Only the greedy king was wealthy.

Ellis pondered and found out the Chinese gooseberry, or kiwifruit, helps to improve skin health. He had learned from his teacher that kiwifruit is packed with Vitamin C and other minerals that benefit people’s skin. Kiwifruit is small, about three-inches long and weighing about four ounces. It has the ability to protect human cells. Usually, kiwifruit is available November through May.

Every day, Ellis started to draw many kiwifruits on vines in the village. At first, people didn’t know kiwifruit was good for them. But, one by one, people began to try the fruit.

The villagers loved the taste of kiwifruit and loved the fruit’s tiny black seeds that added tropical flavor. Not only that, people began to see their skin getting healthier and clearer. So, they made kiwifruit into jam, juice, and wine to enjoy the benefits all year long. People in the village took care of the kiwifruits. They pruned and watered their vines.

The greedy king heard what was happening in his village and wanted to take advantage of Ellis’ miracle. The king secretly called in Ellis and threatened him to draw a tree of gold for him. Ellis knew it was not a good decision to draw a tree of gold for the king. So, wise Ellis suggested to the king that he could only draw the tree of gold in a far island, so people could not steal the king’s gold. The greedy king agreed, and Ellis drew a tree of gold on a remote island. Also, he drew a boat for the king. The king then asked Ellis to draw a strong wind to get the boat to the island. But, because the wind was so strong, the boat wrecked and the king barely swam to the island with the tree of gold. Sadly, he could never return to the village.

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Every day, Ellis walked around the village and drew kiwifruit vines. He was happy to see people getting healthier and happier because of the kiwifruit. People became richer and healthier because of the kiwifruit vines. Also, they had a new, noble king who ruled the village with generosity and wisdom. The king enjoyed the fruit and fully supported kiwifruit farming.

The kiwifruit farming rapidly increased, and villagers built sheltered areas to protect the kiwifruit vines from strong winds and frost. Ellis was also greatly rewarded by the king for his great drawings.

But, he never told anyone about the kiwifruit drawing for the village. The villagers couldn't find out what Ellis had done for the village and how the kiwifruit vines were created. Ellis realized this and was happy that he had been using his magical brush wisely for the people.

Sixth Grade

The Incredible Apples
By Jaden Fontes
St. Stanislaus Catholic School
Judee Sani, Teacher
Stanislaus County

Hello, my name is Mac McIntosh, and I am the Super Duper Orchard Hero. I have three best friends, Ferris Fuji, Gary Gala, and Hank Honeycrisp. We are the Fantastic Four. My superpower is super speed. My buddy, Ferris, is the flier, Hank has super strength, and Gary can disappear into thin air and withstand harsh weather.

We grew up together in our orchard. Granny Smith took care of us. We were orphans in the beginning; four poor apples in a bushel of Red Delicious. That farmer just left us all alone because we were not the same as the others, but Granny did not care. She loved us anyway.

One day, we were playing in our orchard, when we heard a truck pull up and a big cloud of dust engulfed us. We went running to see what was up. Out of the truck, rolled a fine Pink Lady®. YOWZA!! I got bit by the love bug.

After that, I was always trying to impress Penny Pink Lady®, but one day, I looked all over for her and she was missing. I knew it had to be the orchard villain, Benny Bruiser. He knew that would get to me. We had to find her, after all, she was my Pink Lady®. Penny hated Bruiser, and I knew she had to be scared.

My buddies and I got together to make a plan. It was a foggy evening; we could not see much that night. I told Ferris to fly around the perimeter of the orchard. He took Gary with him to search for any evidence.

Sure enough, they saw Penny Pink Lady® tied up. She was being guarded by that crazy Apple Jack.

Gary made himself invisible to look for Bruiser. Soon, Gary signaled to us; they were four rows away. I grabbed Bruiser by his stem, spun him around faster than the speed of light. Ferris flew in and punched him right in his core and Hank turned Bruiser into apple sauce.

From that day forward, Penny was pie in my hands. We knew we were meant to be; we got married and had four super fritters of our own. We had three boys and one girl: Cortland, Jonathan, Spy, Ida, and our dog, Spartan.

We were hoping one of them would have a super power, but no... it was a complete turnover. Later in life, we did find that Spartan has the super power of elasticity—he could stretch like caramel on an apple and had the ability to poop apple dumplings. That has nothing to do with this story really, just a little crisp humor. With his elasticity power, he protects our family. Spartan is the protector of our orchard. He keeps out all of the crazy cobblers with his stretching abilities. Thanks to him, we will always be a safe bunch.

Seventh Grade

Oliver Olive

By Aryanna Sobrevilla

St. Anthony School

Susie Henriques and Michael Hammar, Teachers

Merced County

¡Hola! ¿Vosotros quién son? Yo me llamo Oliver Olive, a little olive in a small branch of an olive tree cutting. This year is 1749, and I am traveling with a group of Franciscan priests. I can hear Father Junípero Serra speaking about how exciting it is to be heading to the new world.

I don't know how he can be excited with all the seasickness and the shortage of food and water we are facing. We are sailing across the Atlantic Ocean. The strong winds and storms toss our small, crowded ship as if a child were playing with a toy boat in the bathtub. I was turning greener than I already was! My pit in my tummy was just not feeling well!

After three months at sea, we finally arrived on Mexico's coastline. We then traveled by donkey to Mexico City. Father Serra was so excited to start settling in California and talked about planting me, his little olive cutting, and planting more cuttings to grow more trees.

Something must have happened to Father Serra because his leg was in a lot of pain as we traveled from Mexico City to California. Father Pablo, another priest traveling with us, would put oils from my ancestors on Father Serra's wound. He still made the long journey.

On July 1, 1769, we arrived in California with Father Serra, other Franciscan priests, and governor of Baja California, Gaspar de Portola. Some men greeted us with cheers.

Father Serra planted my little cutting in the soil. As he planted me, he told me, "We are blessed, little olive. We have made it to California. This will be the capital of agriculture someday, and you are the first olive tree ever planted here."

Father Serra went on to explain to me that California was home to more than 2,000 different kinds of soils with its unique blend of valleys, foothills, mountains, coastal areas and deserts. This was a great combination to produce different kinds of crops.

After my tree grew, it was able to provide more olives that priests used at the missions for fueling lamps, cooking, making soap, lubricating the machines, healing wounds and, most importantly, as holy oils for baptizing new Catholics and anointing the sick.

The process to turn us little olives into oil is quite simple. We are grown, cured, and then pressed under a large stone wheel to take the oils. When the mission priests had enough oils, they would trade the extra oils for other goods from the Native Americans.

As time passed, California did grow to become the capital of agriculture. Many olive trees were planted and now the top olive-producing counties in California are Tulare, San Joaquin, Glenn, Tehama and Fresno. California farmers grow four main varieties of olives. California produces more than 400 different crops.

Did you know that olives are fruit? Many people did not know that. Olive oil continues to be used for cooking, as salad dressing, soothing dry skin, and so many other uses. And it all started with me, Oliver Olive.

Eighth Grade

The Calf Ranch
By Tyce Griswold
Live Oak Middle School
Sharla Ashburn, Teacher
Tulare County

5:30 a.m.

My alarm goes off. I slowly roll out of my bed and brush my teeth. I want to go back to sleep, but I smell sizzling bacon coming from the kitchen. I sit down with my family for breakfast. After we finish breakfast, we put on our work boots and head to the ranch. This is the start of a typical day in the life of a boy who works on a calf ranch.

After I eat breakfast, it's time to feed the calves their breakfast. Calves are young cattle. Female calves are called heifers. My dad and I head to the dairy, where the mother cows live, to pick up the milk for the calves. Then, my dad and I put the milk in the pasteurizer to better ensure good nutrition. While the milk is being pasteurized, we fill up their buckets with grain and water. When the milk is done being pasteurized, we put it in the milk bottles. We put the milk bottles in our bottle trailer that holds four hundred full milk bottles. Once every bottle is loaded onto the trailer, we hook the trailer to the tractor.

Next, my dad and I grab the milk bottles out of the trailers and put them in the calves' bottle holders, while one of the calf ranch workers drives the tractor slowly enough through the calf hutches to where my dad and I can still pull out the milk bottles. The calves are excited about breakfast as they attack the milk bottles.

After feeding all the calves, we go around with the trailer again to pick up the milk bottles. We clean them out for the next feeding because keeping them sanitary is one of the most important things for keeping the calves happy and healthy.

10:00 a.m.

We go and check if any calves are sick with pneumonia or dehydration. If any are sick, we give them medicine, electrolytes, and an I.V. with fluids to prevent dehydration. Next, we get to check the maternity barn for any newborn calves that were born throughout the night. This is one of my favorite parts of the day because you get to see a new life brought into the world.

When the calves are born, they're slimy and wet, but the mother licks them dry. When you pick the calves up, they start to moo their first moos of their life. We will continue to check the maternity barn every hour to make sure all calves are cared for and have good health after being born.

11:00 a.m.

We go eat a quick lunch so that we don't interfere with the calves' eating schedule. All of the calf ranch workers share food. Usually, I want to stay at the calf ranch because the workers make the best Mexican food I've ever had. After lunch, one of the workers puts the milk into the pasteurizer for the calves' next meal. Then, we repeat the same process as we did in the morning; it's round two.

2:00 p.m.

It's time to go to the weaned pen to see if any calves are sick. The weaned pen is for calves that don't drink milk anymore because they're older. This is another one of my favorite parts of the day because I get to chase the

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calves around, and they're really playful. We catch any calves that look like they could be sick, so we can doctor them.

Once we catch them, we gently lay them down on their side to give them a physical exam to check for illness. It's very important to find and treat any sick calves because, just like humans, they're contagious and can get the other calves sick too. By 4:00 p.m., we're finished, and it's time to feed the calves their last meal of the day.

5:30 p.m.

All the calves are fed and ready for bed. Now, it's time for my dad and me to eat our last meal of the day. When we get home to eat dinner, I pour myself a fresh, cold, and creamy glass of milk. I reflect on the day's work and the thing I enjoy most about working at the calf ranch is raising young heifer calves that will one day supply the world with my favorite beverage: milk.

Honorable Mention (Third-Grade Student)

A Wonderful World of Walnuts

By Jackson Edson

Plaza Elementary School

Jennifer Limberg, Teacher

Glenn County

“These trees are humongous! They were once the size of me,” said Farmer Jack. “I remember when I was little, we planted these trees with my dad, my papa, and his two friends, Jose and Manuel. My dad and I put the baby trees in the ground. We all worked all day and all night to get the new trees planted.”

“Finally, the new orchard was planted. They looked like fat sticks coming out of the ground. Next, we had to install the sprinkler irrigation system. We stuck the sprinklers in the ground between the trees, spreading out the irrigation hose along the trees. Months later, the trees had leaves.”

“After one year, branches were developing on the trees. They grew like monsters. When two years had passed, we got a few walnuts. When the walnut trees were in the fourth leaf, which meant four years had passed, the madness started. We had two shakers. A shaker is a machine that has a big claw-like hand with two fingers. It went around the orchard shaking trees. The claw grabbed the tree trunk and shook it, and all the walnuts fell off that tree.”

“Then, the tractor with a blower attachment blew the walnuts into the rows between the trees. The sweeper, a machine that has two brushes on the bottom, swept the walnuts into windrows. Then, the pick-up machine and cart went as fast as they could because people like to steal walnuts. As the walnuts are being picked up, they get a ride to the back of the harvester, to the cart, which is like a big container for walnuts.”

“After all the walnuts are picked up, they are taken to a huller. They are dumped into a big square hole with pipes. All the walnuts fall through the gaps in the pipes. An elevator scoops them up, and they are hulled, dried, and sorted. People pick out the bad ones, and the rest are processed.”

“Some are shelled and others may be sold in the shell. They are put in boxes for shipment. Forklifts pick them up and put them on trucks. Then, they are sent to stores all over the world.”

“Those sure were good old days! Come on, Jack, we need to shake some trees,” said Dad.

“Coming,” said Jack.

“It sure was nice remembering how these humongous trees became what they are today.”

Honorable Mention (Seventh-Grade Student)

Loony for Uni

By Kristie Tan

San Gabriel School

Clarence Atwater, Teacher

Los Angeles County

It was the day of the big seventh-grade field trip to the sea urchin farm and Janelle was very excited. She had been looking forward to this day since the first day of school. This was because the students were going to learn about the seafood industry, a subject Janelle particularly liked. Madison, Janelle's sister, was not excited at all. She hated the idea of sea urchins and wanted nothing to do with them.

"Sea urchin looks gross when it is served! My mom orders it when we eat Japanese food," said Madison to everyone on the bus.

"How do you know you don't like it if you haven't even tried it?" asked Janelle, "Mom said it is considered a delicacy in Japan."

When the class arrived at the farm, Ms. Lee, Janelle's teacher said, "Okay, students, this is our guide, Ms. Sunny; she'll be teaching us about sea urchins today." Janelle and the other students followed Ms. Sunny to a tank full of sea urchins.

Ms. Sunny began, "These purple ones are the most common here at our farm. We also raise red, white, blue, pink and black California urchin. Most of our sea urchins are sold to Japanese restaurants. They make uni, a raw Japanese sea urchin dish, out of it. Urchins are harvested in countries all around the world; however, California has become a leading harvester in recent years. Much of the harvest finds its way overseas to eager Asian customers or to Asian supermarkets here."

Madison rolled her eyes, "Big deal."

Then, Ms. Sunny brought the class into a processing plant, where they crowded close to look through a window. They saw people who were taking the exoskeletons off the urchins. "Uni tastes light, sweet, and somewhat briny. It is very creamy," Ms. Sunny explained. "The meat is fragile and crumbles easily. Uni is a very good source of protein, fiber, Vitamin C and Vitamin A."

"What are those leaves inside the tanks?" asked Janelle.

"Kelp, which is what they would eat in the wild. Some other sea urchin farms make substitute food, thinking it will make the urchin taste better. We believe the reason our uni is so good is because they eat all natural kelp," said Mr. Sunny.

"How do sea urchins eat?" asked Janelle.

"Their mouths are on the bottom of their body," replied Ms. Sunny. "So, they move around, scraping algae off the rocks. In the wild, they get together in large groups to eat all the kelp in their paths. If there are too many and they eat too much, it is harmful to the environment. At that point, the sunflower sea star and sheephead fish would bring the urchin population down. The sunflower star could consume an entire group in one sitting, leaving only a pile of urchin skeletons. Sea urchins are also beneficial though."

After the tour, Ms. Sunny offered each of the students a sample of uni. They all sampled a piece, except Madison.

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“Madison, come try a piece of uni! It’s really good,” said Janelle.

“It doesn’t look like it. It looks gross!” said Madison, disgusted.

Ms. Sunny walked over and told Madison, “You know, when I was a little girl, I hated the idea of eating uni; I didn’t try it. After I learned about uni, just like you did today, I tried some and loved it.”

“Really?” said Madison. “Well, maybe I will try a teeny bite.”

“Yay, Madison! You’re going to love it!” cheered Janelle.

Madison tried it and Janelle was right! It actually tasted good! Just like Ms. Sunny, Madison learned all about sea urchins, finally tried uni and loved it!

That experience was an awesome field trip. Now, not only Janelle was crazy about eating uni; Madison was too! Then, all of a sudden, Janelle had the best idea ever! She would become a sea urchin farmer and spend her days raising and selling sea urchins. She would persuade and educate people, like Madison, to try one of California’s best specialty dishes, uni.