



Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills 8th Edition

Progress Monitoring

Oral Reading Fluency

Grade 7

Student Materials

Zombees

There are many frightening creatures that come from pop culture, history, and Hollywood. Zombies are one of those fictional creatures that can cause nightmares and bad dreams. These fictional creatures are dead bodies that come back to life through an infection or curse. Even though people zombies are fake, zombees are not!

Zombees are honey bees or bumble bees that behave in an odd fashion. Whereas normal honey bees and bumble bees fly with purpose, zombees seem to be erratic in their movements and flight patterns. In essence, they stumble and pace around like fictional zombies! While normal honey bees and bumble bees are active during the day, zombees appear to also be active at night. To make honey, honey bees need to collect pollen from flowers during the day when they are open. So, being active at night doesn't make sense for a honey bee. Additionally, normal honey bees and bumble bees tend to avoid cold weather, but zombees don't seem to mind cold temperatures. So, what is causing this zombie-like behavior in honey bees and bumble bees?

Well, unlike fictional zombies, actual zombees don't die and come back to life. They are actually infected by a tiny fly while the bee is still alive. This fly is now known as the zombie fly because of its effect on bees. The fly is very tiny, only a couple millimeters long; it looks tiny even when it lands on the back of a bee. Once it lands on a bee, it injects its eggs into the abdomen of the honey or bumblebee. Along with the eggs, it transmits a virus that may also be responsible for some of the bees' irregular actions. Once inside the bee, the eggs turn into larvae and grow to the point where the thorax splits open and the larvae or maggots crawl out. Gross!

Since their discovery, zombees have been studied and tracked by scientists. Not only do the zombie flies infect bees, but they also infect certain types of wasps. Zombees are prevalent along the West Coast, but have also been identified across North America. Everyday citizens can participate in tracking the occurrence of zombees through "Zombie Watch" on social media.

Captain Marshmallow

Captain Marshmallow was the Smith family's pet turtle for several years before he even had a name. Then, one day when the oldest daughter turned three, she said that the turtle looked like the green marshmallows in her favorite cereal, Captain Pirate's Magic Gems. So, she naturally started calling him Captain Marshmallow. And so did everyone else, until one day they didn't call him at all because he had disappeared!

The Smith family usually kept Captain Marshmallow in a big aquarium in their basement. He seemed pretty content to live there because it was cool, dark, and it had a water dish that served as a pool. He was also spoiled with his favorite treats – crickets!

Once in a while, on nice days, the Smith family would take Captain Marshmallow out to the backyard where he could wander through the yard, nibble on grass, and hunt for insects. The backyard was completely fenced in, so the Smiths never had to worry about Captain Marshmallow leaving the yard. But one day as the family was heading back inside, Captain Marshmallow was nowhere to be seen. He had somehow escaped! The family foolishly called out his name, but turtles don't respond like dogs. They looked all over the neighborhood, but he was nowhere to be found and no neighbor admitted to seeing him. Alas, Captain Marshmallow was gone.

However, three years later, while pulling into the driveway, the Smiths saw something moving in the front yard. It was Captain Marshmallow! Nobody was quite sure how he survived or where he went. But the Smiths were happy to have him home.

On Top of the Ferris Wheel

If you're curious to know why I never ride the Ferris wheel, I'll tell you the story. On a scorchingly hot day at the county fair, my cousin and I got on the Ferris wheel at a time when maybe everyone else was off getting hotdogs and nachos for dinner—we were the only customers on the ride. The wheel went around a few times, as it usually did, but then it stopped when we were at the top. We rocked our seat back and forth for a while, and then leaned over to the side to see if we could spot any sheep at the farm we could see way over on a distant hill. We expected the ride to re-start at any moment, but it never did.

Later, we found out that the Ferris wheel operator had been standing exposed to full sun all day without drinking water. Shortly after he started up the machinery, he got heat stroke and fainted. The operator who ran the Tea Cups was walking by, and saw him, and went to get help from the medical tent. I guess no one thought to check if anyone was on the wheel, or maybe they just didn't see us. They put an "Out of Order" sign on the gate, took the operator to get medical attention, and left us.

My parents thought we were with my aunt and uncle, and my aunt and uncle thought we were with my parents. It wasn't until they met up on the midway at ten o'clock that our families discovered we were missing. They searched for us throughout the fairgrounds, and then fair security searched for us, and late at night, local police came to investigate. Meanwhile, my cousin and I were stuck on the Ferris wheel all night with nothing but chewing gum to eat.

Finally, in the early morning, the Ferris wheel operator, feeling much better, and refreshed from the shower, started up the machinery. When he saw my cousin and me, he cursed mightily! The police arrived, and fair security, and our parents. Our parents embraced us, and their eyes were all irritated from crying, but they were furious, too.

And that's why I never ride the Ferris wheel.

Benjamin's Alarm Clock

In his dream, Benjamin was leaping and running over hard-packed, gritty rust-colored earth toward a steep drop-off. He was filled with a prickly excitement. He knew that as soon as he stepped over the edge, he would be soaring in the clear, blue sky. He could almost feel himself coasting through the air like a raptor, with the canyon far below, and the wind riffling his hair. When he was only one step away, a voice disrupted his dream, saying, "Benjamin, it's time to get up!"

He forced his eyes open, but his eyelids kept fluttering closed. He saw his dog, Juniper, standing in the middle of his room, smiling at him. He allowed his eyelids to lower, and tried to burrow back into his dream to find his way back to the edge of the cliff. He wanted to experience the sensation of flying, if only for a minute! But, the landscape had vanished, and the dream had evaporated. He was just an ordinary, sleepy, flightless boy cozily resting in bed, whose loyal dog was attempting to wake him up. He heard her toenails clicking toward him on the floorboards.

"Benjamin!" the voice repeated warningly.

Now when he opened his eyes, he saw Juniper sitting right next to his bed, her ears pricked forward attentively, grinning widely, her eyes shining as if she were silently laughing with delight, happily sweeping the floor with her feathery tail. Benjamin's heavy eyelids dropped shut again, and he felt Juniper's slobbery tongue lick his chin. He was extremely ticklish! Okay, Juniper!

Juniper was obviously overjoyed when he was finally, thoroughly awake and alert. Benjamin thought she was probably the most intelligent dog in the world. She indicated with her long, elegant nose that Benjamin ought to sit upright, and he complied. She came to his room every morning to wake him. Now she was jumping encouragingly at his bedside, urging him to stand up.

Benjamin's mom's head appeared around the doorjamb. "Oh, good, you heard me," she said. "You're up!"

Benjamin stood tall, yawned mightily, and stretched his sleepy arms overhead, while Juniper circled his legs and swished the air with her tail in self-congratulation, proud of her accomplishment.

The Standing Invitation

I woke to wild chattering and squeaking. I slammed a pillow over my head, but I just couldn't fall back asleep. It was coming from the window, which I realized was open, so I dragged myself out of bed to close it, tripping over moving boxes as I made my way across the bare, cold room.

The neighbor's house was shorter, so from my window I could easily see the top of their roof, and I made out something that looked like animals with ringed tails and little masks and soon realized they were raccoons.

I grabbed my glasses and saw more clearly that the raccoons were wearing little velvet suits, pink party dresses, and top hats, and they were sipping from cups and eating small, layered cakes off beautiful china plates. Rubbing my eyes, I thought I must be dreaming.

But with a start I thought back to when we'd first opened the door of our new house and found the place spotless and empty save for one thing: a small, framed invitation hanging beside the fireplace. It said simply, Standing Invitation, Rooftop Lounge, Formal Attire, Every Full Moon. My parents had thought it mysterious and funny, so they'd kept it up on the wall.

As I peered over at the neighbor's roof, one of the creatures turned and waved at me causing me to jump in fear. Then it lifted its plate and gestured with its fork to a small slice of layer cake, delicious-looking in the moonlight, and I found myself shaking my head and muttering, "No thanks." The raccoon shrugged.

Next morning I woke wearing my glasses and thinking of the party, so I got up and looked out the window, but there was no sign of the event. I showered, got ready for school, and bid my parents farewell. As I walked out the door, I realized I'd nearly stepped on something, and, crouching down, I saw a tiny pile consisting of a piece of paper, colorful leaves, a chrysanthemum bloom, and an acorn. In the light of the full moon, it had looked like a tiny layer cake. On the piece of paper in purple ink were the words, "We'll see you at the next full moon!"

Two People in a Boat

Penelope and Jeffrey pushed off from the dock. The kayak rocked from side to side and then smoothed out as it glided forward. The first few strokes of their paddles were out of sync, but then they came together.

The sky was a cloudless pale blue, and streaks of bright sunlight gleamed on the dark surface of the lake. Brilliant red, orange, and yellow trees glowed like a ring of flame all around the edges.

There would not be many more days warm enough for paddling. Jeffrey wore his thick, hooded sweatshirt, and Penelope had a warm vest on over her wool sweater, and both felt the chill on their hands. The first frost would come soon, and then the lake would freeze over. Before long, it would be time to get out the skates.

Penelope asked Jeffrey if he had found their math test on Friday difficult, and Jeffrey said that he had, but that he'd worked on the same material with his tutor, so he thought he'd done all right. He asked Penelope what she thought of the new French teacher, and Penelope said he seemed like a bit of a doofus, but at least he was excited about teaching, so probably they'd learn something.

Then they fell silent, but it was not an awkward silence. They listened to the sound of their paddles cutting into the water, and the distant honking of geese flying south overhead. The paddles were extensions of their arms, and made their shoulders and backs feel powerful as they pulled the kayak smoothly forward.

The small island they were headed toward, that had seemed so distant when they pushed off the dock, grew steadily larger. Though neither their paddles nor their arms touched, both Penelope and Jeffrey felt how their strength was connected through the boat, and their power multiplied. Both took in a deep, contented breath of crisp, fall air, and then laughed because they'd breathed simultaneously.

Dirty Rivers

Without water, life can't survive and thrive. Rivers are a source of water for many people around the world. However, people haven't always been responsible for keeping rivers clean. In fact, there have been at least four rivers around the United States that have caught fire!

It may seem impossible that a river could catch on fire, but some do. When rivers get polluted with chemicals and oil, they can and do catch fire. There are a couple ways these rivers become polluted.

One way is dumping. Dumping is the process of discarding unwanted garbage and materials on purpose. One of the ways people dump garbage is at a landfill. Another way is to dump garbage into rivers. This is what happened to the Buffalo River and the Rogue River in the mid-twentieth century. The rivers were a dumping place for industrial and municipal waste. In the end, the oil and compounds caught fire.

Another way rivers become polluted is through unintentional oil spills. Often these spills occur from pipelines or spills during transportation. The oil collects on the river's surface. It floats on top due to its density. This happened on a river in Philadelphia in the late nineteenth century and multiple times on a river in Cleveland.

Because rivers were catching fire and affecting the health of people, something had to be done. Consequently plans, regulations, and laws were enacted. The plans included cleaning procedures. The regulations included measures for proper disposal of waste. The laws were passed to prevent future environmental disaster and to protect people. Additionally, as a part of those new rules, a government agency, the Environmental Protection Agency, was created. The Agency is still responsible for protecting human health and the environment.

Even with these efforts, waterways are under threat. In the United States, chemicals still run off from streets and farms. Also, the Environmental Protection Agency only oversees the United States. So, bodies of water in other countries are still threatened. In fact, in the twenty-first century a river in China caught fire and a lake in India caught fire due to pollution. Clearly, there is still work to be done to clean up and protect our water and protect ourselves.

Stopover in Tornado Alley

Last summer, I was visiting my aunt and uncle in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. They live in an area known as Tornado Alley because there are a lot of tornados there. Suddenly, the sky turned a murky dark green, and I froze where I was standing. I had never seen such an oddly colored sky before. For a long moment, I was absolutely spellbound, more curious than I was frightened, but I couldn't pull myself away from the window.

My aunt was close by, practically shouting in my ear, but her words were being drowned out by the siren's blare. I couldn't take my eyes off what was happening outside the window. The wind, which just minutes earlier had been kicking up dust and tossing it in every direction, had died down completely, and a strange stillness had settled over everything.

"What's wrong with you," my aunt said, gripping my shoulders and turning me. "I'm not going to tell you again." She steered me away from the window. "Grab a pillow and a blanket and get yourself into the cellar with the others. This is no joke!"

Nothing bad happened. The lights flickered a few times, but we didn't lose the electricity. For an hour, we sat around a table in the cellar, playing various card games and listening to the radio. Then, the all clear signal sounded, and we went back upstairs to eat fresh baked apple pie topped with homemade ice cream.

My uncle explained that my aunt wasn't really angry at me. "That warning siren sounds off whenever a tornado is spotted in the area, whether the storm is twenty miles away or just about to bear down on us. Some people around here get careless about reacting because they hear the siren screaming at them but then the warning turns out to be just another false alarm. So, after a while they stop taking the siren seriously."

"Which is about the dumbest thing anybody could ever do," my aunt said.

Waiting for the Easter Bunny

When I was around eight years old, I lived with my mother and sister in a cramped third-floor apartment. One Easter, I got up very early and set out to catch the Easter bunny. Every year, he left our baskets of goodies on the back stairs.

That year, armed with a squirt gun full of Welch's grape juice, I sat down in the hallway to wait. The squirt gun wasn't so much a weapon as the manner in which I preferred to drink my grape juice in those days. I intended no harm. I merely wanted to ask a few questions. Number one on my list was why did many of my classmates get baskets with more candy and better toys.

I'll admit I was nervous, mainly because I didn't know the penalty for a face-to-face encounter, but I suspected it was no less a crime than, say, hiding behind the Christmas tree and surprising Santa, or waking up and catching the tooth fairy with her hand under my pillow. What if the Easter Bunny spotted me before I saw him? Would he turn tail and speed off without leaving a single marshmallow Peep? Would he get scared and bite me? Could you contract rabies or some other disease from a man-sized rabbit?

Despite my excitement and occasional bursts from my squirt gun, I fell asleep. The next thing I remember was my mother jostling me awake. She wanted to know what I was doing in the hallway in my pajamas at six o'clock in the morning. After I'd explained my silly scheme, she gave me a stern look and a short tongue-lashing then she hustled me inside. There, sitting on the kitchen table, were a couple of Easter baskets. Mom explained that the Easter bunny was clever, and had left our gifts in the front hallway this year.

They were nice baskets, much better than the previous year, wrapped in crinkly paper, each containing enough candy to last a week, and a small stuffed toy to boot. It would be several years before I realized they had cost my mother more than she could afford.

Four-Year-Old Peach Pie

It was an important day, and not just because she was about to commence seventh grade, Jenny thought as she balanced the forkful of peach pie.

When she took a bite, tart sweetness gripped the edges of her tongue and memories cascaded: On Max's fourth birthday, he'd torn her favorite book to shreds, then set the shards afloat in his stupid little pool. Despite this, he'd still garnered all the attention, including gifts, an immense cake, and hugs from mom and dad. Furious, she'd retrieved a ripe peach from the kitchen and lobbed it at Max, screaming as he sat destroying one of his presents and getting away with it. The peach missed him by a hair's breadth and splattered.

Later, Mom came to her and said, "Jenny, let's you and I make a peach pie with that." Jenny had crossed her arms and rolled her eyes, but later that night Mom had scrubbed the prickly pit and instructed Jenny to place it in a kitchen cupboard until the heat of the season passed. Jenny had fumed, exasperated and perplexed because this hadn't seemed like any kind of method for making pie. A few weeks later, following mom out to the garden, she'd grudgingly thrown the pit into a hole in the ground and stomped away.

That winter, she'd forgotten all about it because there was school and books and piano, but in spring, Mom said, "I have a surprise for you!" so she'd followed mom to the garden where she'd seen a spindly tree emerging out of the thawed ground. "Can you keep Max away from it?" she'd said, glaring in the direction of her brother.

Over the next few years, she'd replanted it, tended it carefully, watered it, and warned Max to keep a distance. But as time passed, she'd relented and explained to him, "Max, we're making peach pie." She'd even let him have conversations with it.

Now, reflecting back, Jenny was amazed by everything that had transpired since she started making it because today was Max's eighth birthday, and together they'd plucked peaches off Jenny's tree, sliced them, and sugared them. As Max cried "Yum, delicious!" Jenny grinned and went in for a second forkful.

Taming a Wild Horse

Someone must have been the first to tame a wild horse. No one knows for certain who it was. However, in one ancient story, a man from the grasslands of far northern Europe is said to have invented a horse-taming method that is still used today.

The story goes that he was a chief of his tribe and needed to travel a long way to an assembly of many different tribes. He set off walking as fast as he could walk, and after a few days out on the plains he found himself standing on a bank of a furiously churning river.

Looking across the river, he glimpsed a beautiful and majestic wild stallion grazing on the other bank. With many miles still to walk, the man had a clever idea. He made two long ropes out of twisted grass, and tied them to a piece of bark he cut with his knife. These would be the reins and bit for the stallion.

Then he waded into the river and crept up on the stallion through the long grass. Next, he thrust the bark bit into the stallion's mouth and quickly jumped up onto the stallion's back.

The stallion plunged into the river trying to get away from him. Using the reins and his strong arms, the man steered the horse's head so that it faced upstream. The horse jumped and thrashed, but the raging current kept it from making any progress up the river.

Finally, the horse had worn away most of its strength struggling against the vicious current. The man turned the horse's head and guided it up onto the grassy bank. After that, the horse trusted the man riding him and followed the direction of the reins because he had steered him away from the furious river.

Glass Flowers

In the late nineteenth century, the Botanical Museum at Harvard University was the leading center for the study of plants. Students and members of the public could go there to look at plants that did not grow in their gardens or nearby woods and fields. There, they could look at unusual plants, which had been preserved for study by being pressed and dried. However, pressing and drying meant that the plants were flattened and living color lost. They were not the best models.

One day, the director of the museum, George Lincoln Goodale, saw a group of glass sea creatures at a different Harvard museum. They were very beautiful, scientifically accurate models. They had been made by father-and-son glass artists in Germany. Goodale knew he'd found a solution to his problem. He traveled to Germany to ask the Blaschka family if they would make glass models of plants for his museum.

The Blaschka family had been working with glass for three hundred years. They used the lampworking technique, heating the glass to a molten state in a flame, and using hand tools to bend, stretch, shape, and cut it. Leopold spent many years making costume jewellery, lab glass, and glass eyes. His business changed after the death of his first wife. In his grief, he took a voyage to the United States. On the way there, his ship was becalmed for two weeks because there was no wind to push the ship's sails. He spent that time studying and drawing the jellyfish and other sea creatures he could see in the water. When he returned home, he began making glass models from his drawings. He made them initially for his own pleasure, but a friend convinced him that natural history museums around the world would be happy to have them, and would pay him well. Thus, his business became one that made glass models of sea creatures and sold them by mail order. He trained his son, Rudolph, to help him.

Goodale was successful in convincing the Blaschkas to work for him. They made models of plants for almost forty years. They produced approximately four thousand individual pieces that represent almost a thousand plant species. To this day, the glass flowers are the pride of Harvard's Natural History Museum.

What Is Capitalism?

The word "capital" means "money." Capitalism is a system in which money is made and moved around in a society by individuals and corporations. Under capitalism, individual people can own the land, factories, and other resources that produce goods and services. Everyone in society needs goods and services to live. People who do not own any resources except for their time and ability to work for other people are called workers.

One important aspect of capitalism is the idea of competition. Owners of resources compete to produce the best goods and services at the lowest cost. Capitalists want to attract buyers so they can make as much money as possible. They use their money to buy more resources and improve their goods.

Under capitalism, workers compete with one another for the best jobs. And when they get the jobs they compete with one another for promotions and pay raises. Capitalists believe that such competition motivates workers to be creative and hard-working and to produce high quality goods and services.

Most countries in the world today practice some form of capitalism. Some countries also include elements of socialism.

Socialism is a theory that says that the resources for making money should not be owned by individual people. They should belong to everyone in society. Socialists believe that the capitalist system is unfair. It gives too much power to a small number of people (the owners) over the majority (the workers). Socialists believe that everyone should have a good education and a job. Everyone should have a place to live, food to eat, and health care.

Capitalists want people to work hard to make good lives for themselves. But people who can't compete for jobs often get left out. People who didn't go to good schools may not be able to compete for good jobs. People who are sick or old or caring for children may not be able to earn enough money to live. Socialism tries to solve this problem.

Lucky Pennies

My grandmother used to tell me, "If you see a penny, pick it up." She was a superstitious woman who believed finding a penny in the street meant it was your lucky day. She was right, because back then I could walk into the corner store and purchase a piece of penny candy.

Of course, a penny doesn't buy very much anymore. But suppose someone offered you a penny for your thoughts, and you accepted the deal, revealing what was on your mind. Afterwards you discovered that the penny you'd been given was worth several thousand dollars. That would certainly be a lucky day. It's possible to find such a valuable penny.

Several years ago, when I worked as a paperboy, I used to check the dates of the coins my customers gave me. Whenever I found an old coin, I would put it aside. Then, I would go to the library and look up the value of the coin in a book about coin collecting. Most of the time I would be disappointed, but a few times I discovered that the coins I'd put aside were worth more than their face value. Then I would take them to a woman who operated a coin shop. She examined each coin carefully under a giant magnifying glass before making me an offer, which I always accepted without question.

I remember she had a fondness for wheat pennies, so I made a habit of hunting for those. Wheat Pennies, which are easily identified by the wheat stems on the back, are from the early to middle nineteen hundreds. After that, the 'wheat stems' were replaced with the Lincoln Memorial.

If you should stumble upon a wheat penny, hold on to it, because it is definitely worth more than a penny. How much more depends on the year and the overall condition of the penny. A wheat penny in fairly good condition is generally worth anywhere from ten dollars to a few hundred dollars. And some wheat pennies, due to mistakes in minting, are valued at several thousand dollars.

The Lost Rocket

It was gorgeous when the rocket soared upward after a satisfying fizz and a deafening bang. They'd designed it at their local Bottle Rocket Club where Lucie had engineered a way to seal the base of the ship so that the air wouldn't leak and decrease the pressure, and Fred had devised a way of securing it to the launchpad so that it was perfectly erect. It lifted into the clear blue afternoon sky, straight and true and kept going.

Fred glanced over nervously at Lucie. She merely swallowed audibly because, surprisingly, the rocket just kept going for a ways, but at about the lowest cumulus clouds, it began to decelerate and alter its trajectory, the nose beginning to dip, and they watched as it arced and began to plummet to earth. They lost sight of it over the big stand of trees.

"I didn't expect it to go that high," said Fred, and Lucie was nodding solemnly when they heard a piercing scream, then a familiar grumpy voice shouting, "You're gonna pay for this, you rotten beasts!"

For a few quiet moments, they just stared at each other, and then they heard sirens, so they tore off in the opposite direction from Mr. Thomas's house, thumping down into the big woods toward the creek as the whine of the sirens increased in intensity.

Reaching their favorite cave, they ducked breathlessly inside and sat, both thinking the exact same thing which was that they were in a lot of trouble. They shivered as night began to fall and Fred said, "What are we going to do, Lucie?" but she just shook her head.

Then suddenly they saw a flashlight beam bouncing around and Lucie's dad appeared at the mouth of the cave, brandishing their mangled rocket, and he shouted, "I've been looking for you everywhere!"

They were silent through the woods until finally he said, "Did you hear the sirens? Raccoons knocked Mr. Thomas's ladder over and he broke his arm."

Lucie looked at Fred with wide eyes and asked, "Where'd you find the rocket, dad?"

"This? I ran right over it on Oak Street."

American Blue Jeans

Blue jeans as we know them were born one hundred and fifty years ago. In Reno, Nevada, a tailor named Jacob Davis was hired by a miner's wife to make a sturdy pair of work pants for her husband. Davis sewed a pair of strong, canvas pants. They were much like any of the other work pants then on the market. However, to make them a little stronger, he reinforced the corners of the pockets and the bottom of the fly with copper rivets. The miner loved his new pants with the rivets. Word spread, and Davis got many orders to make more. He made some of the pants out of canvas, but he also made some out of the sturdy, flexible, twill cotton, indigo-dyed fabric known as denim.

The reinforced pants were so popular that Davis wanted to patent them, but he could not afford the filing fee. Davis asked Levi Strauss, the man who owned the dry goods store where he bought his fabric, to go into business with him. Strauss agreed. They took out their patent and opened a factory. Levi jeans are named after Levi Strauss, but Davis never got jeans named after him.

The reinforced work pants were originally worn by miners, ranchers, and other people doing rough, outdoor work. But in the Fifties, they became popular with teenagers everywhere after James Dean wore them in a popular movie. Because they were work pants, they were considered inappropriate attire for many places. This made them even more alluring for rebellious teenagers at that time. Although trends in fit, styling, color, and embellishment have come and gone, blue jeans have never fallen out of fashion since then.

The Ring

Today was my lucky day! I was on my way to the library, when I saw an old card table in front of an apartment building two blocks from my house. A hand-lettered sign propped on the table said, "Free! Please take!" In front of the sign was a jumbled assortment of items. There were several boring-looking paperback books, a chipped teacup and its cracked saucer, a collection of unpopular trading cards, a hand-held electric mixer missing its beaters, a dusty bouquet of plastic daffodils, a fraying collar for a cat, and a transparent, red, plastic ring. The ring was the kind you might get from one of those coin-operated vending machines at the grocery store.

I didn't need any ancient books or cups or cards or a mixer or plastic flowers or a cat collar, but I took the ring and put it on my finger. I went sauntering along, admiring my new jewelry. I adjusted it, giving it a little twist on my finger, and a remarkable thing happened. When I twisted the ring, my feet lifted from the ground! I promise I didn't jump. The ring propelled me into the air!

At first, I considered the possibility that I was dreaming. Then, I tried it again. This time, I gave it a stronger twist. And, it wasn't my imagination, the ring really lifted me up in the air! With the bigger twist, it had lifted me higher and taken me further. It was as if I had become an expert long jumper!

I decided to use my ring to get to the library. I thought it would be best to avoid attracting too much attention, so I went through the alley. I twisted the ring sharply, twice around my finger, and whoosh! I traveled the length of the alley and landed directly behind the library.

What an incredible find! Tonight, I'm going to hop to France. Then, maybe the moon!

Squirrel Life

The squirrel was his own boss and had a lot of flexibility, but the downside was that he never knew when the work would be there, and the uncertainty could be very stressful. But fall was a good time, especially in his area. The ground was littered with acorns in his territory, so many that there wasn't enough time in the day to eat or collect them all, no matter how much he hustled. Every day, he deposited a great number into his various bank accounts, but he wasn't very good at remembering where they were, and many of those acorns ended up sprouting and losing their food value. So, he had to keep running around and working.

He left the nest early in the morning. His wife was a freelancer in the same field as he was, but she was on a partial maternity leave currently, taking care of their children, who were still nursing. She couldn't leave them alone for long, so she was taking only short assignments.

The squirrel scampered down the tree head-first. The world smelled rich and good, full of acorns and - he sniffed - maybe a little moisture, indicating rain later in the day. He ran over grass and sidewalk, into weedy areas and flowerbeds, gathering many acorns. He saw numerous relatives out and about, and chirped at them. Inevitably, he also saw a lot of squirrels he wasn't related to and who weren't friends, who were, frankly, competitors. He kept a wary eye on them, chattering sternly and shaking his tail at them if they got too close, ready to chase them off, if necessary.

After a few hours, he went back home. He climbed back into the nest to see his wife and children. He was an involved father, so he curled up with the children for a nap while his wife went out to get some work done.

When she returned, he went out again to fulfill a few more contracts before nightfall. It was a busy life, he reflected as he ran along a branch, the life of a squirrel in the fall. But, he thought as he leapt from the branch to a balcony railing, it was a good, fulfilling life.

Battling Stings

If you have ever been stung by a bee or wasp you know what a pain they are, but there are many ways to battle their stings. The best way to battle stings is not to get stung in the first place. To avoid getting stung you can take several steps whenever you'll be outside for an extended period of time. Avoid wearing brightly colored clothing, which might attract insects. Also, avoid wearing fragrances or scents, which can attract insects. Most importantly, never swat at nearby stinging insects because when threatened they emit a chemical signal, urging other members of the colony to attack.

If you are ever attacked by a swarm of stinging insects, the smartest thing to do is run away. Cover your face with your hands or pull your shirt over your head. Any stings near your mouth, nose, and throat are the most dangerous because they could later cause swelling that could interfere with your breathing. Find the nearest safe area, such as a vehicle or a building.

If you do get stung, don't panic. Inspect the wound to see if the stinger is still embedded in your skin. Look for a little black dot. Often the venom sac will still be attached, so don't use your fingers or tweezers to remove the stinger. If you pinch the venom sac with your fingers or tweezers, you could squeeze more venom into the wound.

The recommended way to remove the stinger is by scraping the area with a straight-edged object, such as a credit card or driver's license. Then wash the area thoroughly with soap and water or clean it with an antiseptic.

It's normal for swelling and redness to occur and for the wound to feel sore and itchy. Apply something cold to the wound. An icepack is best, but you can use anything cold, even a chilled can of soda.

Be attentive to other symptoms. If you have any dizziness or shortness of breath, or severe itching and puffiness on other areas of your body, these are signs of an allergic reaction. If you notice any of these symptoms you should seek medical assistance immediately.

A Summer Sail

The day was blustery and from his house we could spy white caps, so Grandpa insisted I throw on my slicker.

"You're crazy, kid," he mumbled. "If you insist, wear your gear!" Though the wide sky was bright azure, he was my grandpa, so I went dutifully to the hooks and selected a bright yellow slicker and hat. "Good!" he grumbled as the little bone fishhook around his neck jumped merrily.

I'd been begging to be permitted to go for one last sail in his old skiff, and I'd finally convinced him because he knew that, when visiting him, it was my favorite thing. When I was little I'd accompany him, and, as I'd grown older, he'd often let me sail all alone, but for the last few years he'd begged off sailing altogether. "Too ancient," he said, though I vehemently disagreed because I didn't want him to be too old. "It's okay, kid," he'd explained, adding, "My young self will always be sailing on a summer day, no matter what should happen to me."

It made me glum, but it was autumn and I craved one more sail before my parents arrived, so I maneuvered solo around the rocky promontory and headed to the craggy, uninhabited island I'd never visited. But as I rounded the point, I realized Grandpa was right because it had begun to rain and blow, and I looked up to see a figure out on the island, waving furiously at me and crying, "Take shelter! Storm comin'!"

So I docked and trudged after the small figure up to a house I'd never noticed, and, securing the door and shaking out our coats, I saw that he was a kid like me, only he was wearing funny clothes. "Come on, it's summer over here!" he said, so I trailed him cautiously, not sure what he meant, and we walked through a dim and dusty old house and out a back door, where the sun beat down, and a little boat clanged and bobbed out at the end of a dock. The sea was serene and gorgeous, and he said, "Come on!" a small familiar fishhook swinging at his chest, "Let's go for a sail!"