

First Vowel Teams Stories

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Marcus Saves the Day (Part 1)

(Story words: Marcus, family, mobile, new)

Marcus called Gram to check in on her. He called on Gram's house phone which was the phone he could depend on her to answer. "How is your new phone?" he asked. Marcus's family had all chipped in to get a new mobile phone for Gram when her old one broke.

Gram said, "Marcus, I am so glad you called. I want your parents to take that phone back. I am afraid that the new phone was a colossal mistake."

Gram continued, "Your Aunt Jane called me, and I hung up on her. I wanted to call her back, but I could not find my contacts or even a way to dial. These complicated phones are not for old people like me. I have put it back in its box."

Marcus hoped he could help Gram set up her phone by talking her through it. "Gram, get the phone and I can talk

you through it. Press the home button, and then see if you can find a small, gray icon shaped like a gear or wheel that is at the top of the screen,” Marcus began.

“I do not see anything that looks like that,” Gram said. She was frustrated, but she was looking. “Does the home button look like a button or a house?”

“No, Gram, it’s a real button that you press with your thumb on the bottom. It’s not a shape on the screen.” It was clear to Marcus that a remote lesson over the phone was going to fail.

Marcus Saves the Day (Part 2)

(Story word: tech, computer)

“I have time to drive over before work,” Marcus sighed.

“That sounds splendid, Marcus. I will make us some coffee and toast.”

Marcus drove to Gram’s condo and got the phone up and running. He helped Gram load her contacts onto the new phone. Then, Gram called Marcus’s phone and was delighted to hear it ring.

Marcus even helped Gram to take a photo of Ms. Winifred, her old, fat basset, and text it to her friends. Marcus agreed with Gram that Ms. Winifred was the kind of dog who knew how to strike a cute pose.

When Marcus and Gram were outside chatting before he left for work, Mrs. Robinson stopped to say hello. Gram

bragged that Marcus was a wiz when it came to computers and phones. “For Marcus, it was just one, two, three, and everything was set up just right! I could not have done it in a hundred years.”

Mrs. Robinson exclaimed, “What luck for you to have a tech wiz for a grandson! I wish I had someone to help me.”

“I bet Marcus would be glad to help,” Gram said with a smile.

Marcus smiled too. Then he said, “I have to be off to work now or I will be late, but I will be back for a real visit with Gram tomorrow, and I would be glad to look at your phone.”

Too Much Rain

(Story words: Thursday, compass, stretch)

Mr. Lee's backpack trip was the highlight of Bob's June each year. This time the group was on a six day hike to Grass Lake. The trip would end with two full days to relax, swim, and fish at the lake. The group had a plan of backpacking seven miles each day to be at Grass Lake by Friday.

Thursday would be their longest day. They would have to hike ten miles to cross over the summit and make it to the lake.

No one expected rain. But on day two, it began to rain all day. Mr. Lee knew that there were shacks on the trail for hikers to get out of the wind and rain. He used his trail map and compass to locate the shacks.

It was good luck that the shacks were not already being used. Mr. Lee told the group to stack the sleeping bags and backpacks in one shack to keep them from getting wet. That left two shacks for the group to use to stretch out and relax.

Still, the group was upset and restless. No one wanted to spend all day waiting for the rain to stop. Bob said, "I do not mind getting wet. If we push on, we can still make our goal." But Mr. Lee said, "If our sleeping bags get soaked, our trip will be finished."

The group stared at the map and made a new plan. They had planned to hike seven miles each day on days three, four, and five. If they increased their miles to ten, they could still get to Grass Lake by Friday. The best thing to do was to relax and wait for the rain to stop.

At sunrise on day three, the group woke up. The rain had stopped. They packed up fast and began their hike.

The Best Job in Town

(Story words: town, dozens, chocolate)

Mike liked having a job to do after school. Mike's dad Len ran Fluff's, the best donut shop in town. Each day, his dad got up at five so he could open the shop by six. He made the donuts fresh each day while Mike and his mom were still asleep.

Some people liked the plain donuts, but most people chose the frosted ones. Mike liked all donuts, but loved the cake donuts with chocolate frosting best. Each day Len would save two chocolate cake donuts for Mike's after school snack.

Len always wanted to have donuts for the whole day, but sometimes the donuts sold out. Len could not predict when people would come to the shop and ask for dozens of donuts for some big event.

Len hated to see people come to the shop and see that the donuts were gone. But most people would just smile and say that they would come back tomorrow.

There were lots of jobs to do when the shop closed for the day. After school, Mike spent a lot of time sweeping floors, cleaning shelves, and polishing trays. Len told him, "Cleaning the shop is as big a deal as making good donuts. No one wants to eat in a shop where they see filth and grime." Mike knew that his dad was right about people wanting to be in a clean and bright shop.

Mike liked having a job and having some cash too. He could treat himself and his friends to snacks and rides at FunLand. And when he was out of cash, he could bring some donuts to share.

Kath and Bill Need Movers (Part 1)

(Story words: new, movers, ourselves, wall)

Kath and Bill had plans to move to a new house. In their other moves, they did it all themselves by packing their stuff and renting a truck. Bill asked his pals Steve and Don to help with the big items that he and Kath could not lift.

But Kath and Bill now had kids who were two and three. And Bill's pal Steve had been complaining about a bad back. Bill said to Kath, "I know that we do not want to spend a lot of our funds on this move, but I think this move will be too much to do by ourselves."

Kath felt that Bill was right. When taking care of kids it was difficult to find time even to collect boxes and pack stuff. Kath said that she would check on what it would cost to hire real movers.

Kath and Bill knew that movers cost a lot, but they were still in for a shock! They got five bids and all of them were way, way too high. “We may have to give up on finding movers and do this move ourselves after all,” Kath said.

It was good luck that Bill and Kath stopped for a donut at Fluff’s to cheer themselves up. They checked the wall where people put ads up. Kath saw an ad that said, “We are high school kids willing to take on odd jobs.” Bill said, “Let’s go home and make a call!”

Kath and Bill Need Movers (Part 2)

Bill made a phone call and reached Jack, the high school kid who put up the ad at Fluff's. Bill explained the problem he was having finding help for his move. Jack said, "I think we can do your job with ease. I have two strong friends, and we may be free next week to help with your move for a fee that is not too high."

Bill and Jack made a plan to meet the next day at Bill's house to see how much stuff there was to pack and move. Bill, Kath, and Jack looked at all the stuff—beds, chairs, lamps, pots, pans, plates, cups, and so much kids' stuff.

In the basement, Bill and Kath had already packed fifteen boxes, and they had rakes, wrenches, and hoses they wanted to move too. They all predicted that the job would take a whole long day. Jack got a pen and did some math. He said, "Let's say, you pay six hundred bucks to

me and my pals to move stuff for ten hours. I am confident the job can be done!”

Bill and Kath liked this plan. Bill said, “I can rent the truck and do the driving myself.” Jack said, “I can check with my dad and see if he is willing to lend me his old flatbed truck, and we could use it to move some of the stuff too.” He phoned his friends, Will and Dan, and they were just as confident as he was that they were the right team for the job.

Kath said, “Bill and I will begin collecting boxes and packing our stuff now. It will be a big job, but we will save a lot of cash to use on fixing up our next home.”

Kick the Can

(Story word: forget)

“Let’s get off our phones and do something,” Ann said.

“Ok, but what is there to do?” Frank said.

“When we were kids we had so much fun playing kick the can,” Ann continued.

“Now we are teens. Teens don’t play kick the can, but you are right, that was so much fun.”

“Maybe we can get the other teens on the street to play it again for old time’s sake,” Ann said.

“They will say it’s too childish,” Frank said.

“What if we said the game would not begin until ten at night?” Ann asked.

“Some might say yes,” Frank admitted.

“Let’s see,” said Ann.

JoJo, Dan, Will, Ann, Frank, Joe, and Pat met at ten. There was a chill in the air. Dan had to go back home to get a jacket. In Ann’s hand was the lid from a trash can.

Each teen had a flashlight or phone to see with.

Dan said, “I forget how to play.”

JoJo said, “I don’t know if I ever played.”

Pat said, “That’s right. We played all the time when we were kids, but you had not moved here yet.”

Frank said, “Ann can explain the rules.”

Ann said, “Ok, we need something to be our jail and something to be our base.”

Dan said, "See that tree, there? That can be the jail."

Frank said, "Yes, yes, and this lid is the base."

Ann said, "Shush, you told me to explain! Yes, when you are 'it,' you need to stand here and close your eyes and wait for us to hide. Then, you chase us and tag us out, and we wait by the tree in jail. The one who gets to the can and kicks it without being tagged wins. Then she or he is 'it,' and the game begins again."

Dan said, "Is that all there was to the game? It seems kind of lame."

Ann said, "Come on, we are all here, off our phones. Let's play at least one time. You can be 'it.'"

Dan smiled. "Fine."

The teens had fun. Ann had the most fun. But all the running made her huff and puff.

Ben Loves To Fish on Boat and Land

Ben loves to fish. Most of the time, he fishes on land. He stands on the bank of a creek, pond, or lake and casts his line about ten feet from where he stands. He will spend the day looking for the best spots to cast his line. A good spot is where fish are biting and also where there is good shade when it gets hot.

Ben's friend Tim has a fishing boat and loves to fish too. Often, Tim will invite Ben to fish with him on his boat. This means that Ben can bait his line and drop it deep into the lake where some kinds of fish stay. There is no shade and it gets hot. Ben and Tim bring sunscreen and hats.

Ben and Tim pack snacks and drinks. They will often pick a spot on the lake and wait quite a while to see if the fish will come. They do not move the boat much because splashing and movement scare the fish away. They do not even talk a lot.

Ben likes spending time with Tim and fishing with him on his boat. But, when it comes to the fun of fishing, Ben still likes fishing on land the most.

What Are Bobcats Like?

(Story words: bigger, brown, food, per)

Bobcats look a lot like plain old house cats, just quite a bit bigger. Their coats can be gray, brown, or reddish brown. They may have black streaks. All bobcats are spotted, but some have spots only on their chests, while others are spotted on their backs too.

The bobcat got his name from his tail which looks like a small stub, not like the long tail that house cats have. A bobcat's tail looks as if someone had "bobbed" it or cut it off. The tail is black on the top and white on the bottom. Bobcat noses are a reddish pink.

Bobcats populate the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Even though bobcats have to share their habitats with humans, they are not becoming extinct. Today, there are more than 700,000 bobcats living in the wild.

Bobcats eat only meat and hunt many animals and insects for food. They hunt rabbits, rodents, muskrats, fish, geese, and even small deer. Bobcats who live near humans will eat chicken and lamb when they can get it. While bobcats are too small to hunt humans, they could kill a cat or small dog left outside.

In the hours just before sunset, bobcats like to come out to roam and hunt until about midnight. They can run as fast as 30 miles per hour, so they can out-chase many animals. Bobcats climb well, just like house cats. Like other cats, they do not like the water even though they can swim.

When they are not hunting, bobcats rest and sleep in their dens. A bobcat will have a main den, but other small dens too. This way, after a bobcat hunts in all his best spots, he can make a quick sprint to a nearby den for a nap.

What Are Tigers Like?

(Story words: tiger, pounds, orange, yellow, per, sound, born)

Tigers are the biggest of the cats. Some tigers are more than 600 pounds! Because of their size, a tiger can consume more than 80 pounds of meat in one meal.

Unlike most cats, tigers like the water. A tiger will go for a swim just for a refreshing dip. Unlike a bobcat who needs a den to sleep in, a tiger will sleep right out in the open in the grass or on top of a rock. A tiger may feel that he has no one to fear. Tigers are most active at night, when the heat of the sun is not as intense. In the daytime they are quiet unless they are hunting.

Tigers are known for their stripes. Many tigers are reddish-orange with black stripes. Even the skin of a tiger is striped. Most tigers have yellow eyes, but white tigers have blue eyes.

If humans come upon a tiger, they should not run away. Like all cats, tigers love a chase. Because tigers can reach speeds of 40 miles per hour, they can outrun any human. Tigers do not like blaring sounds and are afraid of fire. Humans may use fire and sound to scare them off.

Tiger cubs are born blind and helpless and will spend two years being cared for by their mothers. After that, tigers spend most of their lives alone. The lifespan of a tiger in the wild is 10-15 years. The lifespan of a house cat is 10-15 years too.

Some Facts About Elephants (Part 1)

(Story words: weigh, pounds, food, calf)

The biggest mammal is the blue whale. Blue whales can weigh as much as 400,000 pounds. Many houses weigh less than that!

African elephants are the biggest animals that live on land, and they weigh between 5,000-14,000 pounds. While small compared with whales, they are not light on their feet. Elephants cannot jump the way we can, not just because of how big they are, but because their bones are not shaped to have the “spring” required for jumping.

Elephants are not sluggish and spend most of their time on the move. In fact, in the wild, elephants sleep only two hours a day, and sometimes sleep standing up.

Elephants eat a plant-based diet and need to consume about 300 pounds of food every day.

They spend about 80% of their day looking for food and water and may travel 50 miles in a day. An elephant calf will walk behind its mother, holding onto its mother's tail with its trunk.

Some Facts About Elephants (Part 2)

(Story words: never, smart, forgets)

Elephants have the biggest brains of any land animal and are about as smart as dolphins. People who investigate the lives of elephants have seen many things that display how quick-witted and wise they can be.

There is an old saying, “An elephant never forgets,” and it is true that elephants recognize humans or other elephants that they have not seen for many years. They also can recall where watering holes might be, even when they have not been near that spot in a long time.

The fact that elephants have long life spans of 50-70 years might help them to be wise. The oldest female most often leads the group. With luck, she and the other old females may recall many useful things.

Elephants have strong feelings, the way humans do. An elephant knows when another elephant is feeling glum. It will react by stroking the sad pal with its trunk. And, they respond to the bones or skulls of other elephants with what looks like sadness.

It is rare for elephants to stay in one spot for long; but, when elephants see the remains of another elephant, they may stand near those remains for hours, while stroking the bones or skulls with their trunks or feet. When they see the bones of a non-elephant, they do not act this way. They have holes above their eyes that shed tears when they are stressed or have strong feelings.

Some Facts About Elephants (Part 3)

(Story words: food, bark, shorter)

Elephants have thin ears that look like massive pancakes. While a human may wave his hands to greet a friend, an elephant may flap his big ears. They may do this when delighted to see a pal but also when mad, upset, or stimulated in some way.

Elephants also use their trunks to communicate. They “trumpet” by pushing out air through their trunks. Here again, trumpeting indicates many things. The elephant may be feeling playful, glad, fearful, or mad. An elephant may be calling others to see food or a watering hole nearby.

Elephants have an amazing sense of smell. They can smell water even twelve miles away. An elephant can hold up to two gallons of water in its trunk at one time, and can suck in ten gallons a minute. If they want to clean themselves, they can use their trunks like a spray hose to

give themselves a bath. They can also use their trunks to pick up and grab things, even small things like peanuts.

African elephants have big tusks that protect their trunks. Their tusks evolved from teeth, and elephants use them for many things. They use them to dig for water and to lift objects. Elephants eat bark and use their tusks to scrape the bark off trees.

Most people have a dominant hand, right or left, which gets the most use. It is the same with elephants. They are right-tusked or left-tusked. The dominant tusk will become shorter than the other because it gets much more use.

A Job With Pro Landscaping (Part 1)

(Story words: summer, never)

Matt's mom saw a post on the web from Ken Nealon. The post said that he was looking for summer help for Pro Landscaping.

Matt was sixteen and looking for a summer job. He had known Ken Nealon from the time he was a kid because the Nealons lived on their street. In some ways this made the prospect of asking about a job seem less intimidating, but in other ways it seemed more intimidating. What if Mr. Nealon did not think he was right for the job but did not want to insult him by saying that?

When Matt approached him about the job, Mr. Nealon asked Matt how much landscaping work he had done, and Matt admitted that he had not done much aside from cutting the grass every now and then.

Mr. Nealon said, “I have an idea. How about you work with the team this weekend on a trial basis and see how you like it? I want to be frank with you: landscaping work is not for every strong sixteen-year old like yourself. I would not want you to feel bad if you find that this job is not right for you.”

This was just like Mr. Nealon. He never would want to put anyone down.

“Bring a hat, a canteen of water, and sun block. We will have bug spray in the truck. Oh, and please call me Ken.”

A Job With Pro Landscaping (Part 2)

(Story words: first, front, shovel, soil)

When the weekend came, Matt met the other men on the team, Phil, Max, and Pete, who were all men, not teens. They divided up into two groups. One of the trucks was packed with equipment and mulch and the other was packed with plants.

Matt sat in the back of the second truck. He could see that they were bringing roses, hibiscus, and lilacs (along with other shrubs he did not know the names of) to the job site.

The first half of the day was brutal. The job was to update the landscaping of a big house, including the beds in front of the house and along the driveway. Even though Pro Landscaping had five men on the job, Matt felt amazed that they were planning to do so much in one day, let alone half a day.

Matt unloaded the big bags of mulch and dragged them to the beds. Then Phil called him over to the spot near the driveway. He explained that they needed three deep, wide holes for the lilacs. He used a spade to outline how wide each hole should be, and then gave Matt a shovel.

Every so often, Matt took a quick sip from his canteen and stopped for ten seconds of rest. When Matt had dug the first hole, Phil demonstrated how to plant the shrub in the right mix of soil and compost.

A Job With Pro Landscaping (Part 3)

(Story words: trimmer, mower, dinner, first)

When it was time to stop for lunch, Matt was thinking that he could have a problem keeping up in the next half of the day. The other men on the team seemed relaxed and not tired at all. They were chatting. Matt was quiet. He was just thinking that he was glad his mom had packed him two sandwiches and not one.

The second half of the day was less tiring. The team split up to cut the grass at houses that had year-long contracts with Pro Landscaping. Ken coached Matt on how to use the electric weed trimmer and electric mower, which was kind of fun.

Still, when Matt got home, he was bone tired. He collapsed in a big soft chair and did not move until dinner.

The next day, Matt ran into Ken on the street. Ken asked, “So what did you think of your day of landscaping?”

Matt answered, “It was good that we did this on a trial basis. I can see how tiring all-day landscaping is.”

Ken was smiling and nodding, but not expecting what Matt was going to say next.

“I was dog tired last night, and I’m still tired right now, but I feel that way on the first day of track every season. I know my stamina will increase, and I liked the work and the team.”

Ken gave him a big smile and said, “Fantastic! Welcome to the Pro Landscaping team!”

Fifth Grade Talent Night (Part 1)

(Story words: perform, performed, stage)

When Jill walked into music class, Ms. Gomez said to her, “Can you stop and see me after class?”

What did Ms. Gomez want to ask her? In the back of her mind, Jill predicted that Ms. Gomez was going to ask her about Talent Night.

Each year, the fifth grade class had a Talent Night. The bake sale at Talent Night raised funds for the end of the year bash in June. Ms. Gomez directed the acts and skits, and Ms. Smith ran the bake sale. It was only April, but Ms. Gomez and Ms. Smith were already talking about the upcoming night, hoping that students would begin to sign up to perform or volunteer.

Two years ago, Jill’s big sis Nicole had performed with her best friend Rebecca. They were both good acrobats, and they picked an upbeat song to perform with. They did a

stunning mix of handstands, backbends, and high kicks that went well with the beat of the music.

In her mind, Jill could see Nicole and Rebecca doing the splits at the end of their act. It had been thrilling to see them on stage and then hear the whole school clapping and cheering at the end.

After class, Jill walked up to Ms. Gomez's desk. Ms. Gomez gave her a kind smile and said, "Do you have a clue about why I wanted to see you?"

Jill said, "No," but she suspected that Ms. Gomez wanted to discuss Talent Night, and she was right.

Fifth Grade Talent Night (Part 2)

(Story words: perform, stage)

Ms. Gomez said, “I think you might find that doing a solo would be a lot of fun.”

Jill gave Ms. Gomez a small smile before responding. “Do you say that to all your students?”

Ms. Gomez, “No, I do not advise all my students to think about doing a solo because that would not be right. But I have listened to you singing all year, and I know you would be fantastic if this is something you would like to do.”

This gave Jill something to think about. She did love to sing. Music class was the best time of her school day. She wanted to feel brave and tell Ms. Gomez that she would be thrilled to perform, but something held her back. What if it was time to begin her song and she got stage fright? Nicole and Rebecca had at least had each other if

one of them felt scared. She wished one of her friends liked to sing, but that was not the case.

Jill said, “Thank you for giving me a push, but the thing is I would not have fun being all alone on stage.”

Ms. Gomez sighed. Other students she had approached had this same feeling. Then, she had an insight. “Jill, what if we had a meeting at lunch next week for kids who are just thinking about singing. Maybe students could find other students who wanted to sing a duet?”

Jill answered, “I would come, and I bet others would too.”

A Co-Worker Conflict (Part 1)

(Story words: worker, manager, customers)

Ben had a job he loved at Good Wheels Bikes. Ben worked in the back of the shop, fixing bikes that came in for repair and doing the final check on every bike the shop put together and sold.

Often people did not clean or maintain their bikes. They rode their bikes in rain and mud and neglected to wipe them down. Over time, the chains and gears would accumulate a lot of rust which would prevent them from working well.

Sometimes a bike needed new brakes, but sometimes the wires connecting the brakes to the wheels just needed to be tightened. Ben had always liked working on his own bike, and he liked diagnosing and fixing the problems of all the bikes that came into Good Wheels.

Most times, Good Wheels had two people to work on repairs, Sam and Ben. But Sam had been gone for the last two weeks while he was on a long bike trip with friends in Wisconsin.

Owen, the manager, asked Phil to help Ben so that they would not get behind. Phil was trained in bike repair but rushed through the jobs. He seemed to be distracted by his phone. He left rags and wrenches on the shop floor.

When Phil was working on the sales floor, he was motivated. He liked discussing the bikes with customers. He was good at answering questions and demonstrating how the equipment worked. He took pride in making sales each day—for bikes, helmets, baskets, and other equipment.

A Co-Worker Conflict (Part 2)

(Story words: customer, sorry)

Ben felt put out because Phil's help seemed like not much help at all. But, then, something even more frustrating happened.

Phil was in the front of the shop when a customer came in and complained. He had picked up his bike the day before, but when he met his friends to go for a big ride, he was upset to find that his gears were still sticking. Phil said, "Oh, my gosh, I am so sorry. I will check with the folks in the back and find out what happened. Sometimes people are not as careful as they need to be."

Ben came into the front of the shop. He was so upset. His hands were even shaking a bit. He hoped that he could meet the customer, but the customer had left. He suspected that this bike was one of the bikes that Phil had rushed through last week.

“Excuse me,” he said to Phil and Owen, “if we look at the ticket for this bike, we can see who repaired the bike. After I finish a bike, I put my name and date on the bottom of the repair ticket, so that if there are questions about the bike I can answer them. Sam and I both do that.”

Owen said, “Ben, I know you do. And before we even look at the ticket or discuss the repair on the bike, I want to say that Phil’s comments to the customer who just came in upset me a lot. If I had not been on a phone call I would have come in and cleared things up.”

A Co-Worker Conflict (Part 3)

(Story word: customer)

Phil looked at the ticket. He could see that there was no date and no name. Now he could recognize the bike as one that he had worked on, but he could not recall any of the details of the repair. He wished he could take back everything he said.

Phil said, "I wanted to say something that would make the customer less upset, but what I said was dumb."

Ben could see that Owen and Phil had more to say to each other. Ben said, "Thank you. I am going to get back to my bike."

After the day was over, Phil went into the back of the shop where Ben was sweeping up. He said, "I have been thinking about what happened. I know that I have not been at my best this week. And then what I said to the customer was so stupid. I will do my best to make it up to you."

Ben could see that Phil felt ashamed. Ben would not want to be in his shoes. He gave Phil a small smile and said, “Thank you for saying this. Sam will be back next week, and I think that will be good for all of us.”