

Paisley Peterson
Grade 3
Gratton Elementary
Teacher: Sheila Amaral
Art Teacher: Derek Bills

Amanda's Dream

One day I was outside in my backyard and a tiny praying mantis crawled up my arm. I jumped, then screamed and shouted, "GET OFF ME!" Once I realized what it was, I zoomed in for a closer look. I was amazed that this strange, green creature could be so cool looking. As I looked at his triangular shaped head and his big googly eyes I began to wonder what it would be like if I were a praying mantis. Maybe I could do a STEM project for science class and build an invention that could turn me into a cool praying mantis.

"Amanda! Time for dinner," Mom called.

As I ate my dinner all that I could think about was my praying mantis buddy.

"Mom, do you know anything about praying mantises?" I asked.

Mom smiled at her inquisitive daughter and replied, "Well, I know that praying mantises are beneficial insects. That means they are helpful because they eat harmful garden pests like aphids, crickets, and mosquitoes and they don't harm plants. They use camouflage as protection. I've seen one that looked like the stem of a plant."

"Wow! If I find one, can I keep it for a pet?" I asked.

As Mom tucked me into bed she smiled and whispered, "Good night. We'll talk about that tomorrow."

I quickly fell asleep and started to feel odd. I looked at my hands and I realized that I wasn't myself. I was a praying mantis! To be more specific, I was a California Praying Mantis, also known as *Stagmomantis Californica*. My arms were my front legs and had sharp spines on them. I also had four other legs. My hands are like little scissor claws. I also had those big other legs. My hands are like little scissor claws. I also had those big googly eyes.

Suddenly I turned my head 180 degrees and saw an aphid about sixty feet away. I couldn't resist the urge to bite the back of its neck. The aphid was paralyzed and ready to eat. Yum! That was a delicious treat.

Then a frog jumped out from behind a rock in the garden. It jumped at me, then jumped at me again! Instinct told me that Mr. Frog wanted me as a snack. I flew wait, I fly? I was so amazed by flying that I forgot to look where I was going and landed in a puddle. My wings were pretty wet. I quickly fluttered them to dry them off. "Oh look, a moth!" I was hungry again and

was determined to get that moth. Success! I stopped to rest, looked around and I fluttered my wings again. I was finally able to fly away.

The sound of my alarm clock ringing startled me! Slowly I opened my eyes. I looked at my hands. I had ten fingers. I sat up in my bed and heard my mom calling me for breakfast. I ran to the kitchen to tell my mom about my crazy dream.

"Mom, I had the most amazing dream! I dreamed that I was praying mantis!" I blurted as she sat down at the kitchen table.

"Really? What was your favorite part about being a praying mantis?" Mom asked smiling.

"Well, I think it would be that I had six legs and my front had spines that I used to catch and hold on to my prey. I even thought an aphid was a yummy treat," I said.

"What was the scariest thing that happened in your dream?" asked mom.

"For sure when the frog jumped at me. I just knew that frog wanted to prey on me for a snack," I replied.

I ran to my room to get ready for school. I looked out my window and saw my praying mantis friend sitting with his legs upright, looking like he was praying. I bent down and put my face as close to the window as I could to get a good look. The praying mantis seemed to be smiling at me.

"Now I understand what it is like to be like you," I whispered to my friend, "Now when I see you in the garden I know you are a real garden helper."

The praying mantis flew off.

I watched him fly away. She waved and said, "I hope I see you again someday."

Dottie Davis
Grade 4
Flournoy Elementary
Teacher: Rachel Davis
Art Teacher: Scott Coppenger

First Time Irrigating

"Wake up!! Wake up!!" my dad yelled.

"But dad, it is the middle of the night! Why do I have to wake up?" I asked confused.

"Because we have to irrigate," said my dad.

"What?" I said.

"Irrigate," my dad repeated.

"Why?" I asked.

"I'll explain later," said my dad. So I got dressed. Then, I went outside to the mule, and my dad was there waiting for me. A mule is a side by side, and we use it to go and check irrigation water.

"So dad what is irrigating?" I asked.

"Irrigating is how we water our hay. It goes down a ditch. There are little metal pieces that have a handle, and you pull the handle up. This lets the water get into the field. That is called a gate," explained my dad.

"That is cool" I said excitedly. Then we drove over to a really odd looking shape by a ditch.

"What is that odd looking shape?" I asked.

"That is another type of gate. It is the main gate. That lets all the water flow through our ditch. You spin a wheel that is on the gate. You use this wheel to open or close the gate/" my dad responded.

"Dad why do we have to have all these gates?" I asked.

"We have irrigation gates because if someone else had to get water we could block the water from getting into our fields. If we had no gates, the water would come to us and that would be stealing their water," my dad answered.

"Hurry, help me spin the wheel. We only have five minutes to get the big gate open, and all the little gates on the second field open. Wait, open all the little gates. But, only open the gates on the second field," my dad said in a rush. So, I went to the second field, and I opened all the gates, except one. It was stuck.

I pulled as hard as I could. I pulled, and pulled, and pulled, but it would not budge. I saw the water coming down the ditch. The gate still would not move. Finally, I pulled as hard as I could. I got it out, but I pulled so hard that I fell backwards. I got up just in time. It was a relief. I saw the water flow into the field. I ran over to my dad and told him what happened.

We have two fields. Each field has ten acres. We irrigate one field at a time, because it goes a lot faster.

After opening the gates, we went back inside the house. I ran up to my room. Got into my p.j.'s and sunk into my bed. It felt like one minute, but it actually was two hours. I was getting woke up again by my dad to check the water. I got dressed again, and went outside. We went down the field and drove across it. We went over these big bumps.

"Dad why are there all these bumps?" I asked.

"Those are called berms. A berm is a raised piece of land. The berms keep the water in an area. There is a certain amount of space between the berms. Each area between the berms has one irrigation gate.

"Well, the water is about to the end of the field," my dad said. We drove back to the gates.

"Dottie, go close the gates on the second field, and I'll open the gates on the first field/' my dad told me. I went over to the gates and closed them. my dad and I got back at the same time. We went back inside. I went to sleep again.

It was nearly morning. We checked the water again. It was almost done, so we closed the gates. Then, we went to the big gate, and waited for the water to go out. When it drained, we closed it. now, it is time to give the water to the next farmer. "Dad why do we have to irrigate?" I asked.

"If we did not irrigate, our hay would not grow and would not be healthy," my dad answered.

"Thanks dad for answering all my questions, and thanks for taking me irrigating. now I know all about irrigating," I thanked my dad.

"You're welcome," my dad replied.

The End

Natalie Gonzalez
Grade 5
Kerman-Floyd Elementary
Teacher: Falhon Ferguson
Art Teacher: Alexandra Pease

An Important Lesson

This is a story about a girl's adventure, along with her friends, that teaches, an important lesson about self c-

Well let's, find out, shall we?

Early in the morning Sofi the cotton boll woke happily knowing that it was the day of an important meeting in barn 32.

"GOOOOOD MORNING," Sofi squealed happily.

Her mom asked, "Why are you so excited?"

"Didn't you know mommy... I'M GOING ON A FIELD TRIP, the leader of barn 32 told us," she said in a sassy voice.

"Okay ... if you say so," her mom replied.

Sofi had almost blown her cover! Little did her mom know that SOFI was involved in a horrible situation. The truth was Sofi was going on a "sort-of" field trip ... but not to your typical zoo or art museum. Nope. Sofi was going to their rivals over in Imperial Valley to settle her family's fate through a contest.

You see, once cotton is picked from the plant, it gets shipped out to a cotton factory, where it will no longer be soft, fluffy clouds of cotton. Instead this cotton would go through many stages and be turned into thread. None of the cotton around barn 32 wanted that. A little while later Sofi and her mom walked to the huge cotton barn where the leader lived. The whole cotton family was finally going to talk about a contest that was held every year. "All right, as you all know in a week or so, the three brave cotton bolls are being sent out to represent barn 32. The cotton going are Sofi, Aiden, and Maya! Hopefully they answer the questions right so barn 32 can be saved from processing!" the leader bellowed.

During the 2 weeks, each studied like a high school student would for their S.A.T.'s. Finally, it was the week of the contest Sofi, Aiden, and Maya had just barely managed to hop on a truck that was going to Imperial Valley.

"Aren't you excited?" squealed Maya. She was super excited to show off what she had learned in the past two weeks.

Aiden and Sofi looked at each other and replied in unison, "Nope." Sofi and Aiden were not excited because they knew the fate of their family was in their hands. Finally, they arrived at Imperial Valley. The whole test was about the history of cotton.

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WELCOME TO THE ANNUAL "DO OR SUFFER" COMPETITION!" the announcer roared. The whole crowd eventually calmed down, but the same excitement still buzzed everywhere. Most of the crowd still had no idea who would be representing barn 32.

"Today we have Safi, Maya, and Aiden representing barn 32! ARE YOU READY?" he called. Letting the suspense get higher and higher he finally started with the first question.

"Okaaay ... one contestant from each barn, please come forward," he chimed. After a couple of awkward moments of silence, the sound of shuffling feet could be heard as contestants made their way to the stage. Maya was up first for barn. 32. "Okie dokie, our first question is, when was the oldest cotton fiber and boll fragments found?"

Maya sneered, "That's the easiest question. The answer is the year 5000 BC in Mexico."

"CORRECT!" the announcer called. Next Aiden went up! "Alrighty your question is, Cotton has been worn in India and Egypt for over how many years?"

"For over 5,000 years," Aiden replied.

"Correct! Okay for our last group of constants," he hollered, "Your question is as early as 1500 B.C. cotton was worn by who?"

"The Native Americans," Sofi responded.

"Correct! I can't believe barn 32 answered first for all the questions," he prattled.

"Is it over? Did we win?" Maya chuckled nervously.

"NOPE! BONUS QUESTION! When were cotton seeds first known and recorded?"

"Urm," Sofi was drenched in sweat, she was nervous. This was the hardest question to remember. "My mom told me that her ancestors were a cotton seed that was found in 5 BC! Right?"

"I can't believe it but YES! CORRECT!" the announcer proclaimed.

"HOORAY! We got it right!" the three immediately cheered and celebrated.

They'd done it! They had won. To be honest Sofi had doubted herself so much before the contest that she didn't think that she would, or even could, win. But there they were, celebrating. They would stay happy forever. She learned when you believe in yourself, you can achieve anything.

Nathan Tanega
Grade 6
Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School
Teacher: Rachel Rodriguez

Antony Antavious Takes on Artichokes

There once was a charming little family of ants called the Antavious'. There was papa ant named Antony, mama ant named Antoinette, oldest son ant named Antonio, and youngest daughter ant named Antaro. They all lived happily on their little farm in Ant-i-och, California, growing their almond trees and harvesting the nut. The family was content and enjoyed eating the almonds that they produced. They would enjoy almond waffles for breakfast, almond butter and jelly sandwiches for lunch, and almond-cruste steak for dinner with, of course, almond cake for dessert.

They lived happily this way for many years until one summer they started to notice that the abundance of almonds was starting to decline and there was now a shortage! The drought had taken its toll in California and the trees they farmed no longer had enough water. This caused the almond trees to no longer produce enough almonds for their family. Antoinette was saddened because she could no longer give Antonio and Antaro almond milk for breakfast or have their almond meals. "What are we going to do?" she cried to Antony. "The children need their milk and food!"

"Do not fear, my dear. I shall find a solution!" Antony told his wife.

So, Antony set out to find a solution to their problem. He researched all day and night and, at last, he came across a clever idea. He came across a plant that did not need water to grow! He discovered Jerusalem Artichokes -- this vegetable could grow with very little water. Antony then talked to his cousin Antwan, who was a gardener in S-ANT-a Cruz, and confirmed with him that these vegetables grew well in most climate zones in California. And even better was that the artichokes could be planted in containers so they wouldn't affect the almond trees.

Antony and Antoinette learned from Antwan where to buy the tubers and started to plant them in the potting plants on their farm. In just a few months, the artichokes were growing and they were able to gather loads and loads of this new vegetable with very little watering needed. Antoinette began cooking her family new meals with the artichokes. They enjoyed artichoke omelets for breakfast, sauteed artichokes for lunch, and artichoke soup for dinner with, of course, artichoke ice cream for dessert. The family was once, again, humming with happiness at their good fortune.

Though the artichokes were a great substitute, Antony and his family still missed their almond meals. "What can we do?" they thought. After some reflection, they decided that a prayer for rain, and a little rain "d-ants" never hurt anyone. So that is what they did. Every day, and every night, they would say a rain prayer, and did a little rain "d-ants." They did this for weeks, and

was almost ready to give up. However, one evening, after finishing their artichoke salad dinner, they were playing their board game "Smarty P-ANTS," when they started to hear the pitter patter of rain drops on their roof! They all scuttled outside, and to their delight, saw rain coming down! The rain continued coming down in the coming weeks, and in no time the almond trees started to blossom once more. They were once again able to harvest their field of almond trees.

When Thanksgiving came, Antony and his family were even more grateful than usual. They looked at the feast on their table, and gave thanks for the blessings they were given. They said a prayer of gratitude before their meal of almond-crusting turkey, mashed potatoes and almonds, and yams with almond sauce with, of course, artichoke pie for dessert! All was well once again, in the Antavious ant family, and the almonds and artichokes were harvested abundantly for many years to come!

Caroline Thomsen
Grade 7
Gratton School
Teacher: Rexann Casteel
Art Teacher: Corrie Soderlund

A Fair to Remember

It was a frosty morning in California's Central Valley. I was sleeping cuddled-up alongside my littermates in our warm hutch when I was jolted awake. A girl was pointing at me saying, "I want that one!"

"What's happening?" I asked.

"Congratulations Clover! You're going to be Louise's show rabbit," said my mama.

"Huh?" I said, still confused.

"That girl is Louise. She needs a rabbit to compete in showmanship at the county fair. Louise had her pick of the litter and she picked you!"

My brother Cashew interrupted, "I want to be a show rabbit like Clover."

Mama soothed, "Don't worry Cashew. We're Satin Angoras, which means we're not only beautiful, but our high sheen fur can be harvested every ninety days to make luxury textiles. We're the prized tortoiseshell variety, so you're likely to end up a show bunny as well."

The next day Cashew and the rest of my litter were taken to the Turlock Rabbit Show. Louise visited me when she got back and said excitedly, "All your siblings went home with nice people. Some were adopted by showmanship club kids like me!"

"Mama, what is showmanship club?" I questioned.

"It's a club where kids learn about agriculture. The club helps kids develop citizenship, leadership, responsibility, and life skills."

A few weeks later, Louise took me to my first club meeting. I saw other kids with strange-looking bunnies, which I discovered were different breeds. In fact, there are forty-eight different breeds recognized by the United States! I learned a mother rabbit is called a "dam" and the father is the "sire". Females are "does" and males are "bucks". I was proud to learn that Angoras are the only rabbits whose fur is classified as wool, and that it's used to make scarfs, hats, and many other clothing items.

As winter turned to spring, the club meetings focused on showmanship, which is where kids learned a 16-step judging routine to show and critique their rabbits. We rabbits were flipped over while they checked our bodies from nose to tail. Louise checked my eyes for conjunctivitis (pinkeye) and my teeth for malocclusion, which is where the bottom teeth extend over the top

teeth. I got wiggly when Louise checked my belly for infections called abscesses. It really tickled! I tried hard to cooperate because I'd grown to love and trust Louise.

When summer arrived, Louise and I practiced our showmanship routine every day. I learned to keep still during my starting pose and resisted flipping over, even when it tickled.

Finally, one July morning, Louise's dad drove us to the Stanislaus County Fair. Louise pointed out animal exhibits for cows, swine, poultry, sheep, and even llamas. I drooled over the prize-winning carrots in the horticulture exhibit. I overheard Louise's dad tell her, "There are seventy-eight fairs across California. Fairs help people learn about agriculture and make a positive economic and social impact on local communities."

When we arrived at the rabbit barn, Louise put me in my assigned cage and promised, "I'll be back to feed and water you every day."

In the next cage I saw a rabbit that looked familiar. The rabbit said, "Clover?"

"Cashew!" I squeaked. I was thrilled to be reunited with my brother. Cashew said he had been adopted by a kind boy named Oliver who was also in the showmanship competition.

On show day, Louise and Oliver wore matching slacks and ~~blazers~~ shirts. They both sported ~~deep blue~~ green and white 4-H hats. Louise wore a matching green scarf and Oliver a green tie.

We walked over to the show ring and they called Oliver's name. "Good luck Cashew," I called.

"Thanks sis," he replied.

Louise and I watched Oliver and Cashew do their routine. Then Louise was called to the ring. I was so nervous! Louise set me down on the judge's table and all our training kicked in. We moved through the routine with ease and left the ring feeling triumphant.

When the competition ended, the judge awarded tenth through third place. Then the judge announced, "The contest for the top spot was very close. In second place is ... Louise and Clover! And in first place is ... Oliver and Cashew!"

"Congratulations Cashew!" I squealed.

"Thanks Clover. I bet you'll bring home the blue ribbon next year."

Louise gave me a snuggle and said how much she loved me and enjoyed our fair experience together. I beamed back at her and realized I couldn't feel more like a winner than I already did!

Joey Linane
Grade 8
Los Olivos School
Teacher: Suzanne Squines
Art Teacher: Kelsey Dillard

The Himalayan Blackberry

Oh no, I thought, here come those hideous, rumbling machines. I knew this sound very well. It had been going on for the past week, always in the mornings. This was picking week at the blackberry farm in Monterey, California. Thousands of blackberries surrounded me on large brambles. Most were fully matured berries, but some were just little green berries, and others, just flowers.

The loud rumbling of the tractor carrying the pickers spread fear among the blackberry brambles. Everyone dreaded the day in which they would be picked and packaged in plastic containers or smashed into jam, or juiced for expensive drinks. The grumbling of the tractor grew louder and louder. We couldn't do anything except pray for the best. All hope vanished for the row of brambles I was in as around fifty pickers got off the tractor and began picking all of us blackberries and throwing us into a cardboard box to die.

One picker quickly came up to where I was attached to the vines. I prayed he wouldn't see me but I was the first he saw. The second I got picked I expected to see a final flash of light, then nothing at all. To my surprise, I felt perfectly normal and could see everything fine. I was tossed into the center of the box while other berries were tossed next to me and alongside me. Hundreds of berries filled up the bowl until I could no longer see the sky. The last bit I saw looked like it was the afternoon and the picking would continue on.

It felt like hours until I felt myself get thrown onto a scale and weighed. In the process of getting weighed, hundreds of other blackberries hit me and knocked me around, leaving half my berry mush, and the other half badly bruised and red with juice. A man started sorting out the berries, either calling out store, or juice. I knew what would happen to me if I were to be made into juice. I hoped I would go to the stores, but quietly, in my condition, I knew I was going to a juicer to be made into juice.

"Juice," called out the sorter. I was picked up and thrown into another cardboard box along with hundreds of other damaged blackberries. Once again more damaged berries rained down on me until I could no longer see the light. A few minutes later a lid was placed over the top of the box. We were placed in a large truck and sat for what would probably be another few hours.

Four hours later we were all packed up and the truck began to drive off. Two hours later the truck came to a stop. We were lifted out of the truck and brought into an air-conditioned building. We were dumped out onto a flat tray and once again sorted, yet in groups of

hundreds, for juicing. We were gathered up and scooped into a titanium bowl. Right before we were tossed into the blender to sort the juice from the seeds and pulp, I looked up and saw a calendar reading July 25, 2018, blackberry picking season. We got dumped into the blender with the lid placed over the top and the blending began and everything went dark.

Suddenly I was able to see, I was floating on top of pulp and blackberry juice. The lid of the container was removed and a spoon with tons of tiny holes swept through the juice, removing all the pulp and seeds. We were cleaned under water to separate all the pulp, then we were spread out to dry. After an hour of drying, we were scraped up and spread out in large plastic bags, then got air sealed in and placed in a refrigerator for thirteen weeks.

When the weeks passed, we were packaged in small bags that read Himalayan Blackberry. We were driven a short distance away then removed from the package. We were on a dirt field with hundreds of rows for growing. All of us seeds were planted in the many rows, evenly spaced out. I was tossed somewhere toward the end then covered with soil and four fertilizer pellets. One year later I grew into a full bramble. Another year later I began to start fruiting. Every three years or so the process repeated in some way and I always ended up in a new blackberry field.

Sahib Sangha
Grade 6
Shannon Ranch Elementary
Teacher: Ann Fry
Art Teacher: Kelsey Dillard

America in a Jar

"E Pluribus Unum," my teacher stated. My head is slouched against my desk. "Today for homework you will have to write an essay or create a project to demonstrate the meaning behind these words," continues my teacher. I knew I would procrastinate, but when my teacher said, "Due tomorrow," my eyes widened. As she talks more about the project my eyes glance off to the clock. I start my mental countdown to the end of the day. 3 ... 2 ... 1 ... Ring! Inside our class it's like a stampede as everybody rushes out. I walk home under the Central Valley's blazing sun with my shoulders drooped and my feet feeling like lead with the thought that I already had homework on the first day of school.

As I open my front door, the phrase "E Pluribus Unum" keeps running in my head. I find out online that it is America's motto in Latin which means "out of many, one". All this thinking was making me hungry. I walk to the fridge to fix myself a snack. I get myself chips and a bit of salsa that my mom had made. The salsa is incredibly colorful and just the refreshing treat I need. As I take a bite, the words "many" and "one" start circling my thoughts. A light bulb goes off in my head. I have my big idea: America in a Jar!

I grab my wallet, a few burlap shopping bags and I bike my way to the farmers market. As I look at all the stalls full of colorful, California grown fruits and veggies, I decide to make the most diverse salsa I can. I chat with the farmers about the produce history as I shop. I pack my bag with tomatoes and find out from the farmer that they originate from Central and South America. Next, I pick up jalapenos and find that they can be traced back to Mexico. To add even more heat to the salsa, I grab a red onion and for sourness a lemon, both of which I come to find first grew in Asia. I was lucky enough to find a ripe avocado ready for slicing with roots tied back to South America. I stroll over to the fruits and pack up a handful of strawberries which were first bred in France. I look down at my beautiful bounty, bulging from my burlap bags and feel blessed to be a Californian. I asked for help in finding pineapples and mangos, but a farmer tells me that I would not find any that were locally grown. With a quick trip to the grocery store for these two fruits, my shopping will be complete and I will be ready to create "Salsa the Great."

I place a huge bowl on the counter. Time to get to work! First, I chop up tomatoes and jalapenos which both contain vitamin C. I cut the tart pineapple, which strengthens your immune system. I chop up the mango, which helps to prevent cancer. Next, I add sweet strawberries for their antioxidants, lemons for their vitamin C, and red onions for their

magnesium. Lastly, I add a creamy avocado for their nearly 20 vitamins and minerals. Next, I try my best to chiffonade the mint and cilantro picked from my backyard, both of which help with digestion. After that step, I add a pinch of Himalayan pink salt. Salt is good because it is essential for sustaining hydration levels in the body. My version of America not only looked good but tasted superb too!

The class looked dumbfounded as I stood in front of them with my jar. I hold up my jar and say this is "America the Great! America is made up of people from all over the world, bringing with them their unique language, culture, traditions, religion and new ways to understand the world. The diversity of many created one great America. This salsa represents America because it has ingredients that were all once foreign, but now most have become a part of the United States agricultural landscape. In fact, I purchased most of these ingredients from local California farmers. All of these ingredients not only bring unique flavor to the mix, but also distinct health benefits. Individually, these ingredients are tasty, but together they are spectacular, just like our country." Proudly looking at my jar, I ask the class, "Who wants to taste America?"