

Ellie Stover
Grade 3
The Mystery of Merino's Wool
Teacher: Jennifer Limberg, Plaza School
County: Glenn
Illustrated by: Inderkum High School

The Mystery of Merino's Wool

One fine summer day, three sheep were playing in the barnyard. Their names were Merino, Dorper, and Churra. Merino liked to run fast. Dorper liked to watch her baby, Charlie, run and Churra liked to study pieces of grass. Dorper was watching her baby when she saw the farmer put Merino on a leash. Dorper was worried so she called her baby close to her.

The farmer took Merino, and they walked down to the barn. When it was time for lunch, Merino came scrambling out of the barn. When Merino came to a stop, he yelled to his friends, "Hey, Dorper and Churra!"

They looked at him closely before Dorper asked, "Who are you?"

"Me?" replied Merino. "I am your friend, Merino. You know me!"

"We do?" asked Dorper and Churra, confusedly.

"What happened to you?" asked Dorper.

"Nothing," said Merino.

"Oh, something happened to you," stated Churra.

Merino looked down at himself and said, "OMG, I'm naked!"

"There are over one billion sheep in the world, and you are not the only one to get sheared," said Churra.

"Sheared! I didn't want to be sheared!" cried Merino.

"Hey, this is a mystery to find Merino's wool the farmer sheared off of him!" yelled Charlie, Dorper's baby lamb. Merino and Churra nodded excitedly.

Merino shouted, "I know where to look first!"

"Where?" asked Dorper and Churra.

"The barn! That's where I went first," said Merino.

"Then let's go! What are we waiting for?" Dorper shouted as she was racing toward the barn.

The farmer saw them running and called, "Get into the barnyard!" Dorper, Merino and Churra had to listen to the farmer, so they turned around and went back to the barnyard.

"We need a way into the barn," stuttered Charlie frantically.

"Yeah, I think I know a way in," Churra wailed.

"Really?" replied Merino.

"Yeah, I really know a way in! Let's go, buddies!" Churra said as he led the way back to the barn. "Follow me, my fellow sheep friends."

When they made it to the barn, they slipped in quietly and saw something magical. The reason the farmer sheared Merino was because the farmer's wife wanted to make something special from it. As they watched, the farmer came in with some tea for his wife. He was surprised to see the three sheep. "You better get into the barnyard right now," he said.

The sheep didn't get out of the barn, so the farmer chased the three sheep around the barn!

His wife calmly said, "Let them stay, James."

"Okay, Lily," said James quietly back to his wife.

Lily offered the sheep a handful of hay to bring them closer to her and the baby. Lily showed them the adorable little baby girl that was swaddled in a blanket that Lily had crocheted using Merino's wool. She whispered into Merino's ear softly, "Your wool is the finest and softest wool we have ever been lucky enough to have on our farm. Our baby is so happy and warm. Thank you!"

From then on, the farmer sheared Merino every spring so the new baby girl could have a sweatshirt, mittens, and blanket for every winter. Merino was very happy he could help his beautiful family.

Valerie Nava
Grade 4
The Strawberry's Owner
Teacher: Chris Lavagnino, Ronald Reagan Elementary
County: Madera
Illustrated by: Delta High School

The Strawberry's Owner

Lillian and her family grew lots of strawberries in the fields around their house in Chowchilla, California. On her 10th birthday, she asked for something she really, really wanted: a pet dog.

"Can I please get a pet today?" Lillian asked.

"No, I don't think you've earned that kind of responsibility," said her mom.

"But it's my birthday," Lillian whined.

"Since you don't do your chores, you have not shown how responsible you can be," said her dad. "Remember, strawberries are our livelihood. We need to have our patches ready for harvest each day during the springtime in the Central Valley."

"But Dad, I learned at school that most California strawberries are grown in coastal regions, like Monterey and other coastal counties. Why is our patch so important?"

"Mija, Central Valley strawberries are just as important – and delicious – to the people who live here," explained Dad.

Lillian barely heard his answer, because she was already starting her chores.

One Saturday morning, one of her chores was to pick strawberries by hand. As she picked them one by one, she knew that she needed to put the ripe ones in her basket immediately; otherwise she might be tempted to eat them all! As she worked, she heard a small sound from the ground.

"Hi," said a sweet voice.

"Who said that?" questioned Lillian.

"Mmmm me," was the whispered response.

"Whooo?" questioned Lillian. "Where are you?"

"I'm down here," whispered the strawberry. Lillian looked down and saw a strawberry rolling around in the small patch by her foot.

"Am I seeing things?" said Lillian.

"Nope," said the strawberry.

"Okay, I think I am going to faint," explained Lillian.

“Please don’t fall on me,” said the strawberry. “I don’t want to become jam!”

After a moment, the strawberry asked, “I was just wondering: What is that stuff on your face? It looks like you got rained on, but the sun is shining!”

“I’ve been crying. But maybe you can help me! I really want to get a pet, but my parents won’t let me,” said Lillian.

“Why won’t they? You seem berry responsible to me. I watched how careful you were at picking my cousins and how gently you placed them in your basket,” said the strawberry.

“They said that I am not responsible and that I do not do my chores,” said Lillian.

“Well, is that true?” asked the inquisitive berry.

“Well, I guess I have been kind of lazy lately,” considered the girl. “But it is important for everyone to do their part on the family farm. I sure don’t want my mama and papa having to do extra work because of me.” Lillian thought about all the long hours her parents worked on the farm each day. “Yeah, I really do need to start helping more.”

“That is a great idea! Then they will see how responsible you really are,” said the strawberry excitedly.

Lillian began to brainstorm all the extra things she could do around the property. During the morning, she and the berry talked about the history of strawberries and how they got their names. As she was packing things away for the day, she had one final question for her little red friend.

“I’ve always wondered: How many seeds do you have?”

“Well, I’m not sure. I was told by my great-grandberry that we sometimes have as many as 200 seeds.”

“Wow, imagine how many new berries might grow from you!”

The strawberry blushed.

For the next several weeks, Lillian did all of her chores and a few extra things to help out her parents around the farm. Her parents noticed.

“We are very proud of you, Lillian. You have been much better with your chores,” said her dad.

“Oh my – you did all your work. I think you deserve a pet,” said Lillian’s mom.

“Thank you so much! I really appreciate it,” said Lillian in excitement. And later that day, Lillian got to go to the pet store to choose her puppy.

Now each day when her chores are done, the three friends take afternoon walks together. Lillian’s parents often look out from the house admiring the change in their daughter’s attitude and of her maturing attitude about daily living on a farm. But no matter how much they try, her parents can still not figure out what the little red bump on the dog’s back really is.

Olivia Piazza
Grade 5
One Amazing Family
Teacher: Sheila Amaral, Gratton Elementary
County: Stanislaus
Illustrated by: Woodland High School

One Amazing Family

One night after dinner, my sister, Izzy, and I were sitting on the couch with my family. Dad and Grandpa were talking about our family history. They were looking at some old pictures Grandpa found while cleaning his office.

“This one is of my dad, whose parents immigrated to America from Sicily, Italy. They landed in Portland, Oregon. They came here in the 1900s. This photograph is very old,” said my grandpa.

“Oh, that looks like you, Dad,” I said as I leaned over. It was an old black-and-white photo. On the back it said 194 with a stain covering the rest of the year and what looked like a signature. “What does that say?”

“It says 1947, Tony Piazza,” Grandpa explained. “My dad’s family moved from Portland to a farm in Mountain View. Then in the 1950s, we moved here to the small town of Denair. That’s when we started this farm.”

“How did the farm start?” I wondered.

“My parents had a farm by the river. It was the second time in three years that the farm had flooded. So, in 1950 they found this place and moved here,” stated Grandpa.

I replied, “That’s so cool!” I was learning so much by listening to my grandparents and dad talk.

Grandpa was saying, “California is the best place for almonds to grow because of our climate. We have hot summers and cool winters that almonds need.”

Eventually, Dad said, “Well, girls, it’s time to go.”

I gave Grandma and Grandpa a hug goodbye.

The next morning, I went to school. When I got home, I didn’t hear the loud noises of machinery. It wasn’t until dinner that I knew what happened.

“The huller broke down,” Dad explained. “Nothing to worry about. We’ll have it fixed by tomorrow.”

The next day, the huller still wasn’t running. I thought by the time I got home, it would surely be back on.

After school, the huller was quiet as a ghost town. I did my homework and read in my room. Outside, I saw Dad with a worried look on his face. He was talking to a worker. Suddenly, he started walking toward the house.

Three days later, Dad sadly said, "I don't know how to fix the huller."

I was thinking about the picture of Grandpa Tony. "Grandpa!" I announced loudly.

"What?" asked Izzy.

"We could ask Grandpa how to fix the huller!" I yelled.

"Calm down, Olivia," Mom said.

"No, that's a great idea!" exclaimed Dad.

Right away, my family went next door to my grandparents' house.

I was the first there. I opened the door; Dad was right on my heels. "Grandpa!" I shouted.

"Mom! Dad!" called out my dad.

"We're right here," Grandma said.

"What's going on?" Grandpa asked.

"The huller broke down and we don't know how to fix it! Do you know how to make the repairs?" questioned Izzy.

"What's wrong?" asked Grandpa.

Dad told him, "It just stopped. Completely stopped."

"Oh no," he whispered.

"What?" I whispered back.

"This has happened only twice before, and it was long ago," he said quietly.

"But you know what to do, right?" Izzy asked. "Right?"

"No," he muttered. "No, I don't know what to do."

We sat in silence, all thinking.

Finally, it dawned on me. "What about, what if, somehow..."

"What!" gasped everyone.

"Maybe we could search the office for ideas," I finished.

Grandpa said, "This photo was in a file with other documents."

"Let's look for it!" cried Grandma.

So, after some intense searching and scouring the office for the file, Mom held up a thin file.

“That’s it!” Grandpa announced.

We all started reading the file. I saw it said, *To fix the broken huller, check a secluded conduit. There might be damage such as...*

“Mice!” announced Grandpa. “I know how to fix this!”

The next day, Dad and Grandpa fixed the huller. It was loud and annoying, but I couldn’t be happier to hear it. Later that day, Grandpa and I added two pictures to a brand-new file with a note. One was the picture of Grandpa Tony. The other was a picture I had taken on my sister’s camera. And the note, in my own handwriting, said, *If the huller breaks down, all you need is an amazing family to help you fix it.*

Finley Brady

Grade 6

My Journey: A Drop of Water

Teacher: Star Pedron, Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School

County: Stanislaus

Illustrated by: Florin High School

My Journey: A Drop of Water

Hi, my name is Sam. Let me tell you a little about myself. I am a drop of water living in the Pacific Ocean. A long time ago, I used to be a tiny snowflake that fell from a cloud. Then, I left my family and came to rest on Mount Shasta. It was a dark night when I found myself on Mount Shasta without my friends or family.

After that winter, I melted and started my journey in a stream. A couple of years later, I found myself in Lake Shasta. I was now a drop of water in the lake. My time at Lake Shasta was really fun because I made lots of new friends while I was there. A year passed and all of my friends moved on from the lake. I was now very sad and lonely.

All of a sudden when I was taking a little nap, the water started rushing really fast. I started moving but I didn't know where I was going. After a few weeks, I found myself in the Sacramento River near Redding. I was really sad to see that I was no longer in Lake Shasta, but things started to lift up when I made a new friend, Bob. We had so much fun together, playing different games and wondering where we were going to stop next.

Then one day, a truck came along and sucked Bob and me out of the river and pumped us into a water tower. I was very curious if I was ever going to get out of the water tower in Redding and so was Bob. A whole year passed while Bob and I hung out in the water tower. It was dark in there and we wondered if we would ever see the light of day again.

Suddenly, one day I woke up and I was in a water truck with Bob heading south on I-5. We were on our way to Williams. We were both wondering what Williams was going to look like when we got there. Williams ended up being nice and a very sweet town. There were also lots of crops to water in Williams, like rice and tomatoes. We ended up being sprayed onto a road and trickled into a rice field. We hung out in that rice field and a bunch of different irrigation canals for another couple of years. I had the best time in Williams with Bob.

After three full years in and around Williams, Bob and I made our way back to the Sacramento River. We floated all the way down to the city of Sacramento. It was a beautiful town with lots of trees. We saw many different birds on the river, like ducks and geese. Bob and I also would make our way through some of the city pipes and into people's cups so we could watch some Kings games here and there. Somehow, though, we always made it back to the Sacramento River.

After a few more years, we decided it was time to leave Sacramento and make our way toward the Pacific Ocean. We had heard about it from the salmon who would swim through each fall.

On the next part of our journey, we made our way to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The delta was huge and a little confusing. There were many different kinds of fish in the delta, like bass, catfish, and some perch. Bob and I loved exploring there. We even went by lots of fields full of asparagus. Here and there I would miss my family, but having Bob around made it much less lonely.

After a good amount of time in the delta, we moved to our final destination, the Pacific Ocean. We dropped in right at San Francisco. I was so happy to be there with my best friend, Bob. He and I saw the Golden Gate Bridge and lots of salmon on their way to the Sacramento River. We met some seals, sea lions, and so many other kinds of fish, even some big sharks.

Bob and I still reminisce about our adventures down the Sacramento River. All those twists and turns took us right to where we wanted to be, in the Pacific Ocean, happily ever after.

Isabella Diep
Grade 7
The Pistachio Man
Teacher: Roxanne Lemos, Hickman Charter School
County: Stanislaus
Illustrated by: Franklin High School

The Pistachio Man

Iran, 1926

Will bent over the baskets of nuts. Dozens of baskets filled to the brim with assortments of nuts stood outside. The Persian (modern-day Iran) heat blazed down on him. The Agah family were prominent nut farmers in Rafsanjan, a city in Iran. Will had been very interested in the nut process, so the family had generously let him use their nuts for agricultural research.

Wiping beads of sweat off his brow, he selected a knobbly beige nut with hazel lines running here and there across the nut, like veins. He tasted it. Good, he thought, but not what he was looking for.

Cautiously he examined the nuts. As he picked through the baskets of nuts, he tasted hazelnut, almond and peanut. Those nuts he was quite familiar with, though they tasted better than the ones in Maryland.

Red. He looked again. A red nut. Hastily he plucked the nut from the basket and examined it. He popped it into his mouth. Delicious. This nut had a milky flavor with a hint of sweetness.

Greedily he hunted the other baskets for the red nut, cramming them into his mouth. Satisfied, he summoned Parvaneh, the 14-year-old daughter of Shahryar Agah, the owner of the nut farm. Parvaneh had been entrusted with the task of answering all Will's questions and showing him around the farm.

Parvaneh appeared a few moments later with her younger brother, 4-year-old Farrokh, in her arms.

"Parvaneh, what is this nut?" William asked.

She answered in her heavily accented English, "It is the pistachio nut."

"The pistachio nut is new to me. Would your family allow me to take some home with me?"

She tilted her head, while little, tired Farrokh fussed.

"I will go ask my father," she responded at last.

When Shahryar Agah arrived, Will expressed his desire to take the pistachio back home. Shahryar and William discussed it deep into the night.

The next morning, the decision was made. William would be allowed to take the pistachio nut back to America. He would take some pistachio seeds, and hopefully be able to plant them in the American soil.

California, 1926

Lawrence eagerly ripped open the envelope. He was sitting on his kitchen stool, a pile of mail in front of him. Sorting through the mail, he came across an envelope from William.

William Whitehouse and Lawrence Wilson were best friends. They trusted each other, and told each other everything. Lawrence had been a bit hurt when Will had left without a trace, but here was something from Will.

A letter tumbled out of the unsealed envelope. As fast as an arrow whizzing through the air, Lawrence speedily snatched up the letter. Unfolding it he read,

1926

Dear Lawrence,

My most cherished friend, I sincerely apologize for not telling you about my trip to Persia. I went because I'd heard about their famous nut farms, and as you know, since I was studying agriculture, I thought it would be fun to take a trip to the Middle East. I hoped to learn about the subject more. I found a unique nut. The nut growers call it the pistachio nut. I've never tasted it before, so I have decided to take some seeds back to California and grow them. I hope you approve of my plan because you are the first one I've told beside the nut farmers who gave me the permission. See you soon.

Yours truly,

William E. Whitehouse

Lawrence read the letter again. And again. And again. He should have known good ole' Will was up to something. But never in his life would he think Will was going to travel to the Middle East. He knew one thing, though: Mrs. Whitehouse, Will's mother, deserved to know. He left the house.

California, 1929

News of Will's return spread like wildfire. Everywhere in his hometown, people wanted some of the pistachio seeds. They planted them. They watered them. The seeds grew. In people's yards and farms, many pistachio trees were planted. People loved the pistachios and harvested many. Factories opened, businesses started, people farmed and planted. Many years later, California was one of the main pistachio-producing states in the United States.

Still, even though he didn't know it now, pistachios would become a very popular snack. People would buy them everywhere, eat them everywhere and sell them everywhere. Will was proud, prouder than he had ever been in his whole life. He was the "Pistachio Man."

Nathan Tanega

Grade 8

Laura & Lana: California Fairies of Flora and Fauna

Teacher: Star Pedron, Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School

County: Stanislaus

Illustrated by: Sheldon High School

Laura and Lana: California Fairies of Flora and Fauna

There once were two fairies named Laura and Lana
Their hope was to help our state's flora and fauna
Nurturing plants and helping animals: their power
California their kingdom, their home in Bellflower.

Lana's focus was animals and all things therewith
With her magic touch, cattle and calves are ranked fifth
And also in things like sheep, turkeys, and hogs,
And horses and chicken, but sorry, no frogs!
And then there's the egg and here's a quick guide
You can eat it poached or hard boiled or scrambled or fried
An omelet or eggs Benedict, there are so many ways
I know I, personally, could eat them for days!
And when you drink milk (and I think that you should)
It is not only delicious, but it does a body good!
In addition to beef, we produce poultry and dairy,
All this, and much more, is made with the help of our fairy.

Laura, the other fairy, uses charms on our plants
And that might make you think of a fern at first glance,
But you would be wrong because this group is quite vast
Grapes and melons are a part of this cast.
Of course, there is corn and almonds and grains
And soybeans and vegetables and other food for our brains
Oranges, strawberries, apricots, lettuce
Figs, prunes, pistachios, and even asparagus
From avocados to lemons to peaches galore
These are just some of the things, and there's more!
In addition, there are carrots, which are good for the eyes
And cotton, which turns into socks, tees, and ties
With grapes, of course, comes all varieties of wine
And garlic, which has always been a favorite of mine!
Plums and tomatoes and broccoli and beets
And would you believe this list is not even complete?

Floriculture is also a big focus to Flora
This includes plants and flowers (which I just adore-ahh)
From poinsettias to orchids to a rose and a lily

An azalea, but not Iggy, because that would be silly!
Ranunculus, sunflowers, and carnations and more
And dahlias and anemones add beauty to any décor
And with this crop, we are number one in the nation
And they are wonderful to give on any occasion!

Thanks to the fairies, our state's export value is in billions
And we are the top ag-producing state (so shouldn't that be zillions?)
And while these fairies work hard and are charmers
It isn't elves or gnomes, but people, especially the farmers
That work hardest of all with their own magical wands
That would be tractors and planters that run dusk 'til dawn.
From grain augers and harrows to balers and more
Their powers seem enchanting like tales in a lore
But with all they produce, it really is no wonder
California ag is number one and that is no blunder!
So, alas, it is the hard work that rules the day
No one would argue that, wouldn't you say?

So let us say thanks to both Laura and Lana
With their support, we are tops in both flora and fauna!

Ellie Gomes
Grade 8
Alissa Alfalfa's Big Journey
Teacher: Amy Hurlimann, Scott Valley Junior High
County: Siskiyou
Illustrated by: Sheldon High School

Alissa Alfalfa's Big Journey

On a warm spring morning in the middle of May, there was a field of alfalfa sprouts on a farm in Scott Valley. All of the sprouts were happy to be out of the ground and looking around, all except one. Her name was Alissa Alfalfa and she did not feel special. Alissa wanted to be unique; she did not like that there was a whole field of alfalfa that looked just like her. A bird that often visited happened to notice the sad little alfalfa plant.

"Hi, my name is Maggie, the magpie. I come to visit this alfalfa field often, and I can't help but wonder why you are sad," inquired the bird.

"I am sad because I want to be unique. I don't want to look like everyone else. I feel like no one wants me because there are so many like me," Alissa explained sadly.

"Are you kidding? You are California-grown alfalfa!" Maggie exclaimed.

Alissa looked up at the bird. "What do you mean?" she asked curiously.

"Do you not know how important you are not only to the U.S. but the whole world? You are what feeds the world, and you are extra special because you are a very beautiful kind of alfalfa that only grows in California!" the bird explained.

"Wow! I really am important!" Alissa happily replied.

"Soon enough you will be cut, dried and grouped together with all your friends, then shipped on trucks and boats to see the world! The hay you make is so special that it is wanted all over this country and many others," Maggie told Alissa.

This made Alissa really happy; she must be unique after all. Now she was so proud to be an alfalfa plant and wanted to share what she had learned from the magpie with all her friends.

"Everyone, guess what?" Alissa asked excitedly.

"What?" asked the alfalfa sprouts.

"We are going to travel! My friend Maggie says that California alfalfa is wanted all over the world!" she beamed.

All the other young alfalfa plants looked around at each other in awe. Many said things like, "Wow!" but most said nothing at all because they were speechless. The young plants were all amazed.

After about 50 days of growing, the alfalfa sprouts became big, beautiful plants what were ready to be cut, dried and baled. All the alfalfa plants were excited and a little nervous to see where they were going to be sent. Their friend Maggie came to visit often and was there all day when they were being cut. When all were on the ground, they were raked and left out in the sun to dry. Then one day, a loud baler came and grouped them together, making bales. The bales were loaded on a truck that drove many hours down to the Bay Area, occasionally stopping to deliver alfalfa bales. The whole journey, Maggie stayed by Alissa's side.

"Wow! What is that, Maggie?" all the alfalfa plants would ask when dazzled by things they had never seen before.

Usually Maggie would say things like, "That is a town where people live" or "That is a place where the trucks fill up the diesel tank, so they can keep driving us." When the truck full of beautiful Scott Valley hay finally arrived at the Port of Long Beach, it was sorted and loaded onto ships that would cross the Pacific Ocean. They had never seen such tall buildings! Maggie told Alissa the ships would travel to Japan, China, Arabia, Korea, and other countries needing them.

"Wow!" they exclaimed.

"Now our ship will be going to Japan!" Maggie told them.

After they said goodbye to their friends, the ship started its journey to Japan. Along the way, Alissa was amazed by the many ocean animals Maggie pointed out. After 30 days, they docked in the Port of Tokyo and were loaded into trucks once again. Alissa watched as some of her friends were unloaded on a dairy farm, others on a beef ranch, and a few at a feed store. Finally, Alissa and Maggie arrived in a fancy stable yard. Maggie took to the sky to look around.

"Oh my goodness! Alissa, you won't believe it! We are at the Tokyo Racecourse. The Japan Cup is next week, and you have been sent to help the beautiful horses prepare for the race." Maggie sang with delight.

Alissa beamed with pride. Never in her life had she been so happy.