

John's Bright Idea

7th Grade Fiction

Source: Public Domain, adapted by Center for Urban Education, may be used with citation.

This is an old story. It was written 100 years ago. So you will find it has a different style from stories people read and write today. For example, you'll read that the children sell popcorn for 5 cents a bag and are thrilled. Today, that's not enough money to buy much.

Mrs. Meredith was a most kind and thoughtful woman. She spent a great deal of time visiting the poor. She knew they had problems. She wanted to help them. She brought food. She brought medicine, too.

The family lived in a small community with some people who were poor and others who were rich. In the town, some people worked but others had no jobs, and families needed money to pay their bills. Some families were poor because the parents had lost jobs, and the economy was in decline. People tried to help each other meet these challenges.

One morning she told her children about a family she had visited the day before. There was a man sick in bed, his wife, who took care of him and could not go out to work, and their little boy. The little boy--his name was Bernard--had interested her very much.

"I wish you could see him," she said to her own children, John, Harry, and Clara, "he is such a help to his mother. He wants very much to earn some money, but I don't see what he can do."

After their mother had left the room, the children sat thinking about Bernard. "I wish we could help him to earn money," said Clara. "His family is suffering so much."

"So do I," said Harry. "We really should do something to assist them."

For some moments, John said nothing, but, suddenly, he sprang to his feet and cried, "I have a great idea! I have a solution that we can all help accomplish."

The other children also jumped up all attention. When John had an idea, it was sure to be a good one. "I tell you what we can do," said John. "You know that big box of corn Uncle John sent us for popping? Well, we can pop it, and put it into paper bags, and Bernard can take it around to the houses and sell it."

When Mrs. Meredith heard of John's idea, she, too, thought it a good one. Very soon, the children were busy popping the corn, while their mother went out to buy the paper bags. When she came back, she brought Bernard with her.

In a short time, he started out on his new business, and, much sooner than could be expected, returned with an empty basket. Tucked into one of his mittens were ten nickels. He had never earned so much money before in his life. When he found that it was all to be his, he was so delighted he could hardly speak, but his bright smiling face spoke for him. After he had run home to take the money to his mother, John said, "We have corn enough left to send Bernard out ever so many times. May we do it again?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Meredith, "you may send him every Saturday morning, if you will pop the corn for him yourselves. John, will you agree to take charge of the work?"

"Indeed I will," replied John, and he kept his word. For many weeks, every Saturday morning, no matter what opportunities there were to play, he saw that the corn was all popped, the paper bags filled, and arranged in the basket when Bernard arrived.

People began to watch for the "little pop-corn boy," and every week he had at least fifty cents to take home, and often significantly more, income that supported his family. All of this was because of the way John carried out his bright idea.

Infer and Support the Main Idea - Fiction

Questions developed by Center for Urban Education for use by Chicago Public Schools 2008-2009.

Choose the best answer for each question.

1. What is the main idea of the second paragraph?

- a. Mrs. Meredith was poor.
- b. Many people are poor.
- c. Mrs. Meredith helped poor people.
- d. Mrs. Meredith was worried.

3. What is the main idea of the whole passage?

- a. Helping someone to earn money is better than giving them money.
- b. Making popcorn and selling it is a good way to make money.
- c. People in a community help each other.
- d. The children figured out a way to sell popcorn.

2. What is the main idea of the third paragraph?

- a. They lived in a small town.
- b. People helped each other.
- c. Poor people lost jobs.
- d. Many people lived in their town.

4. What is a good title for the story?

- a. How Bernard Earned Monday
- b. How One Family Helped Another
- c. Small Town Life
- d. Helping the Poor

5. *Write your own answer to this question. How do you figure out the main idea of a story?*

TEACHER NOTES: Develop Students' Skills: Exercise Thinking

These questions have not been validated, so decisions about student's achievement should not be made based on their responses. They are intended to exercise skills. Recommended activities include: students work in pairs to choose the best response; give students the questions without the responses so they generate their own answers; students make up additional questions; students make up questions like these for another passage.

Answers: *You can remove this answer key and then give it to students and ask them to figure out the basis for the correct response.*

Item	1	2	3	4
Answer	c	a	a	b

Question 5 is open-ended. Here is a suggested response.
Answers should include, you look at the title, you think about the events.