

John's Bright Idea

CCSSR1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Public Domain Text; Questions by Center for Urban Education

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.

What is the main idea of this passage? Explain why you think that is the main idea.