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Welcome to first grade! As your child moves beyond kindergarten, you may notice a new sense of mental alertness and an ability to grasp more difficult concepts emerging. These awakenings allow your child to develop further as an individual, and they open doors for new learning experiences. This year is a year of new discovery as you share stories, create, explore your community, and find a deeper understanding of the world around you.

You will find that our curriculum is different from what may be found at most public schools. Although we present all the traditional subjects, our approach is one that focuses more on the imaginative spirit of the child than one that is purely academic. You also may find that our timeline for presenting and acquiring certain specific skills is unlike those in more traditional models of education. We believe if the mind is forced into development before it is ready, it can have an effect on the child’s overall growth as an individual, so we do not attempt to pressure specific academic skills in the early years.

In your role as home teacher, you are always encouraged to try new approaches relevant to your individual needs; you need not feel bound by the confines of the assignments presented. Our curriculum does intentionally focus on a few guiding principles in our approach to education, however. It is helpful to become familiar with these principles in order to guide your child’s learning on a deeper level.

- **A child should be surrounded by an archetypal view of the world.** We use fairy tales, myths, and legends in our curriculum for this reason. For more explanation about this principle, see the section titled “Nurturing a Healthy Imagination” found in this introduction.

- **A child needs to have opportunities for artistic expression.** In all of a child’s artistic explorations, it is good to remember that the process is more important than the form. Although there are numerous techniques and mediums available for your child to use to create art, we often center our activities around crayon drawing since it is easily accessible and can be used to express any idea.

- **Each subject should be presented in a natural, informal manner.** This is important so that your child does not feel forced into any activity but rather is motivated by their own curiosity and interest in the topic. This is especially true during the younger years because children learn so much through daily activities and play. The best approach is to integrate the recommendations in the curriculum into your daily life so that there isn’t necessarily a distinction between “home” and “school.”

- **Unfold the potential within yourself so that you can respond more deeply and spontaneously to your child.** In order to refine the strengths in your child, you must also strive to unfold and refine
your own strengths. It is the light of your own understanding, and the love you have for your child, that will be the driving force in their growth as an individual. This is the essence and the gift of being a home teacher.

This resource book will give you important information about the Oak Meadow process and approach to each subject. Enjoy your homeschooling journey!

**Course Materials**

The Oak Meadow first grade course consists of the following materials:

- *Oak Meadow Grade 1 Coursebook* provides all the instructions and assignments for the full year of first grade.

- *Oak Meadow Grade 1 Resource Book* (this book) includes extensive instructions about teaching each subject, plus all the stories you will be reading this year in language arts, social studies, math, and science. It also includes an alternate set of stories in math so you have plenty of material with which to teach math concepts.

- *The Heart of Learning* provides important support and guidance for the homeschooling parent through a series of essays on the educational philosophy and learning principles behind the early grades of Oak Meadow. It includes information on child development as well as suggestions on how to develop your skills as a home teacher.

- *Oak Meadow Guide to Teaching the Early Grades* includes practical information on how to present the lesson material as well as an extensive collection of songs, poems, and action verses that you'll be using through the early grades.

- *Oak Meadow Circle Time Songs CD* provides musical inspiration for your circle time and includes all the songs listed in *Oak Meadow Guide to Teaching the Early Grades*.

- *Oak Meadow Crafts for the Early Grades* includes all the instructions for crafts mentioned in the coursebook.

- *Healthy Living from the Start: A Health Curriculum for Grades K–3* offers a wide range of activities around health-related topics. Each lesson includes a set of activities to choose from for each grade level, making it easy to use with children of different ages.

- *Oak Meadow Word Families* is used in language arts as children move from letter and sound recognition to the recognition of related words and emerging reading skills.
Supplies Needed throughout the Year

In addition to the materials listed in each lesson, the following items are recommended throughout the curriculum and can be obtained at local craft and art supply stores or by purchasing the first grade craft kit in the Oak Meadow bookstore.

**Main lesson books:** These are large format, spiral-bound blank books that will be used for most of your child’s lesson work. We recommend one for language arts and social studies, one for science, and one for math. You will probably use three main lesson books in the first semester and three in the second semester. (More details on the main lesson books are below.)

**Jumbo beeswax block or stick crayons:** A good quality set of crayons in the seven colors of the rainbow is an excellent choice.

**Watercolor paints:** You will want to have one tube each of cobalt blue, carmine red, and cadmium pale yellow. Your child will have the opportunity to explore how these three primary colors form the basis of every other color.

**Watercolor paintbrushes:** We recommend brushes with a broad bristle (¾”). You will want one for you and one for your child.

**Watercolor paper:** Sturdy 90-lb. paper in a 9” × 12” size works very well.

**Modeling material:** Beeswax is a delightful material that softens in the hand, has a wonderful smell, and comes in beautiful colors. It can take some getting used to, so be patient as you and your child become familiar with it. Clay and homemade salt dough are also fun to work with. (You’ll find some recipes in the Creative Play section.) These materials are used to mold the shapes of each of the letters and numbers, so you will want to have a supply readily available.

**Paper:** You will want to have on hand a good supply of practice or scratch paper. Copier paper works well.

**Deck of cards:** Cards are an excellent way to practice math skills.
Globe (or world map): A globe is a wonderful addition to any household, as is a good world atlas or world map.

You will find a complete list of materials, sorted both by lesson and alphabetically, in the appendix of Oak Meadow Grade 1 Coursebook.

How the Course Is Set Up

This curriculum is divided into 36 lessons, each intended to be completed over the course of one week. Each lesson includes explorations for circle time, language arts, social studies, math, science, arts and crafts, music, movement, and health. You will also see the following sections in the coursebook:

Weekly Planner: This is a blank form that you can use each week to plan out your schedule. You can coordinate walks, trips to the library, and projects that need some advance preparation on your weekly planner and then return to it to jot down notes about what worked well, what needs more attention, and what you'd like to save to work on at a later time. You will use your weekly planner to keep track of what you did each week—this can make year-end reporting and documentation much easier.

Assignment Summary: You'll find a checklist of assignments at the beginning of each lesson. This lets you check off assignments as you complete them and see at a glance what still needs to be done.

Materials: We've included a materials list for each lesson, divided by project or activity. You can use this to prepare in advance for each day's work. There is a complete list of materials in the appendix of Oak Meadow Grade 1 Coursebook if you'd like to stock up in advance.

Learning Assessment: At the end of each lesson, we've included a learning assessment form to help you track your child's progress and stay attuned to the key competencies that are being developed. Some parents may want to create their own rubrics or bypass formal assessment entirely for the time being. The learning assessment forms can provide an easy way to document your child's development for reporting purposes.

For Enrolled Students: This section is for families who are enrolled in Oak Meadow School and who send their work to an Oak Meadow teacher. It provides information and reminders about how and when to submit work.
You will find, especially in the early lessons, specific instructions and a range of suggestions for how to structure the day, introduce subjects, and proceed through the work of drawing and writing. However, we encourage home teachers to try a variety of methods as the year goes on.

We urge you to stay responsive to your child and make adjustments along the way based on your child’s interests and needs. Your sincere interest in both your child and the subject will draw forth the spark of learning. Beyond the lesson plans and the activities, it is who you are and what you bring to the learning relationship that makes it successful and rewarding. The Oak Meadow curriculum is not only interested in filling children with facts but also in helping parents and children become intelligent human beings who are able to respond thoughtfully, imaginatively, and effectively to the world in which they live.

**How to Begin**

If this is your first experience with homeschooling, understand that it can take weeks or even a few months before you and your child have settled into a rhythm and routine that feels natural and productive. Be patient with yourself and your child. Expect that things may feel awkward or even unsuccessful in your first few lessons. You and your child will soon learn what works well and what does not, and together you will find your own unique and enjoyable approach to homeschooling.

In the meantime, here are a few tips that will help your homeschooling journey be more successful.

- After reading the introductory section, read through lesson 1 to get a sense of what you will be doing in the first week. Look ahead several lessons so that you become familiar with the weekly format and the pace of the activities.

- Refer to the materials list and gather needed supplies. You may want to do this one week at a time, or gather all the materials you’ll need for several months in advance.

- Begin reading *The Heart of Learning* and *Oak Meadow Guide to Teaching the Early Grades*. You don’t have to complete both before you begin your lesson work, but it will be helpful to familiarize yourself with what each contains, and give yourself time to absorb some of it. You will probably find yourself referring back to both of these books throughout the year.

- Choose where to begin your science curriculum based on the season. Lessons 1–12 focus on fall activities, lessons 13–24 focus on winter, and lessons 25–36 focus on spring. Select the appropriate group of science lessons for the season of the year in which you are beginning. If you live in a more temperate region, you can still do most of the assignments since science explorations are focused on observation and description. You can use whatever nature offers you outside your door for your science activities. All the other subjects in the curriculum should be followed sequentially, lessons 1–36.

- After you have looked through all your materials and read a few lessons, if you have questions that are not answered by looking over more lessons or rereading the introductory section, feel free to call the Oak Meadow office to ask for clarification.
How to Use the Main Lesson Book

The main lesson book (MLB) serves as a way to collect all of your child's work in one place. You may want to have a set of books for your child and another set of books for yourself—this way you can work together side by side.

In each main lesson book, your child will fill the blank pages with beautiful, colorful drawings and carefully formed letters and numbers. Your child should be encouraged to put their best work in this book and to take the time to decorate the borders of the pages, add detail to drawings, and cover the whole page. You can model this behavior in your own main lesson book. You can also glue into the main lesson book photos of larger projects, leaves and seeds collected for science studies, and anything else you would like to include in this special book. A main lesson book takes on a marvelous personality during the course of the year and becomes a treasured record of your child's educational journey.

We encourage the use of crayons for both drawing and writing in first grade, and Oak Meadow's main lesson books come with onion skin paper between the pages to keep the crayon drawing from rubbing off on other pages. Colored pencils also work well in the main lesson book. Unlike markers or pens, crayons and colored pencils produce a softer, more changeable line that encourages students to trace over their work if they need to change the shape of a form, letter, or number.

Circle Time

It is helpful to start each day with a brief time of gathering together, which we call circle time. It is often easy and fun to include brothers, sisters, and other family members in circle time. Through vigorous, playful rhyming verses, songs, and large and small motor activities, the body and mind "wake up" and become ready for more focused work later in the morning.

Here are some tips for a successful circle time.

Location: When possible, have your circle time in the same area of your home each morning so this place becomes associated with the activity. An open, uncluttered space with plenty of morning light is particularly nice.
**Beginning verse:** Say the opening verse (or a poem of your choice) once everyone is sitting or standing together. Your child will join you as the verse becomes familiar. Speaking clearly emphasizes the sounds of the letters in a way that can greatly enhance the language arts lessons.

**Songs, movement verses, and fingerplays:** Each day you will do several songs and verses, many of which will have movements. Fingerplays are verses that are acted out using the hands in some way, and movement verses encourage more full-body involvement. It is important to use the same songs and verses each day for at least a week, or even several weeks, so that your child has time to learn it and become fully involved. Children love repetition! Add one or two new songs and verses each week, but go back to familiar verses frequently. Many fingerplays, verses, songs, and activities are included in *Oak Meadow Guide to Teaching the Early Grades*, and you can learn the tunes to the songs on the *Oak Meadow Circle Time Songs CD*. You may also remember some childhood favorites, or you can get a book from the library for more ideas. Add stretching, skipping, jumping, and crawling games to really get things moving. Get down on the floor and roll around. Be silly, playful, and energetic!

**Closing verse:** End with the closing verse before you begin the morning main lesson. We suggest you use the same opening and closing verse for about three months. Surprisingly, children do not tend to get tired of the opening and closing verses since these verses act as markers for the beginning and end of circle time. New opening and closing verses are introduced every 12 weeks (lesson 1, lesson 13, and lesson 25).

**Creating a Daily Structure and Rhythm**

We have written the curriculum so that each subject is presented in a natural, informal manner. It is always beneficial when children do not feel forced into the activity but instead become involved because it sparks something within them. Some children enjoy a consistent schedule for “school” each day, and for those children it is important to maintain regular periods, but this is not necessarily the most effective way to approach homeschooling for most four- to six-year-olds. We feel that the best approach is often to integrate the projects and assignments into the natural flow of daily activities so the child doesn’t make a distinction between “school” and “life.” In this way, the child gradually develops the attitude that expanding one's knowledge and capabilities is part of the process of life and indeed is what life is all about.

Regardless of whether or not you establish a regular school schedule, creating a consistent daily rhythm is highly recommended. Living and learning are synonymous, and homeschooling should feel like a natural extension of family life. Taking the time and effort to establish your daily rhythm will make a difference in the long run. Young children naturally need a lot of freedom to explore and express themselves creatively. They also need to have opportunities to move from active, outward (“expanded”) states, such as vigorous or social play, to more inward, focused (“contracted”) states, such as listening to a story or drawing. When a child is either expanded or contracted for too long a period of time, they become restless and irritable.
The following schedule offers a natural balance between active and focused periods, and it provides a good foundation for a daily routine.

**Circle time**: After the morning routine of dressing and eating breakfast is finished, start your day with 15 minutes of verses, songs, fingerplays, and movement activities.

**Morning main lesson**: After circle time, proceed to a 45–60-minute main lesson activity. We suggest that you focus on language arts and social studies three times per week and math two times per week. It is not necessary to do each subject each day. However, if your child prefers to do a little math and a little language arts and social studies each day (perhaps imitating an older sibling), you can certainly plan your schedule accordingly.

**Creative free play**: This is a daily time when you can attend to your other responsibilities while also allowing your child to play freely or imitate you in your activities. Provide many opportunities for creative play, and consider this play period an important part of learning. There are many suggestions for creative play in this introduction, and we encourage you to frequently put away unused toys and introduce new elements for your child to discover.

**Afternoon lesson time**: After lunch, two afternoons a week, focus on science lessons, enjoying relevant stories and activities for about an hour. Three days a week, use this time for arts and crafts, music, movement, and health. You might choose two to do each day, depending on how long a particular project takes.

**Outings and field trips**: Walks through the neighborhood, trips to stores, visits to museums, and play dates at the playground are all learning experiences that you can integrate into your home-schooling day. Bringing your child out into a range of social environments helps them learn a great deal about the larger community and is an important element of your home-based education. Make note of special outings on your weekly planner to incorporate them into your week’s activities.
Creative free play: After dinner, allow opportunities for relaxed play in the evening.

Bedtime routine: Your bedtime story will become an important part of the next day’s lessons. You’ll find more detailed suggestions for a bedtime routine below.

Most home teachers of first grade spend about two hours during the day of focused time with their children in homeschooling and another hour at bedtime, reading stories and talking about the day.

Creating a Simple Bedtime Routine

Children have a real need for order and rhythm in their lives, and the bedtime ritual is an important part of this routine. It can be short or long and can include a variety of elements, depending on the needs of the child and the parents, but the basic purpose is always the same: to help the child calm down from the day’s activities and prepare for sleep.

Each family has its own version of the bedtime ritual, but the traditional approach usually includes taking a bath, brushing teeth, hearing a story, giving and receiving goodnight kisses, and in some families, saying prayers or recounting the blessings of the day (remembering the good things that happened). Of course, interspersed in this sequence are brief conversations that can range from the practical to the sublime, but all help to resolve the concerns of the day and prepare the child for a restful night’s sleep.

For all of us, sleep is a time of rejuvenation—a time to let go of our daily concerns and recharge ourselves physically, emotionally, and mentally. When we view sleep in this light and prepare ourselves consciously for it each night, we derive the greatest benefit from it. As important as this is for adults, it is even more important for children because they are more sensitive than adults and are more influenced by what they experience prior to sleeping.

We offer the following tips to help you create a healthy and satisfying bedtime routine.

Be consistent, but not rigid: Try to be consistent in the timing and the sequence of the elements of the routine, but don’t let the routine become more important than the child. Children derive great satisfaction from following a set pattern, but this doesn’t mean that everything must always be exactly the same, or that you should never skip an evening, or that you can’t do things a little differently if the circumstances require it. The whole tone of the bedtime ritual should be relaxed and loving, not pressured and forceful. If change is necessary, talk with your child about it first. Children can be quite reasonable when they know their needs, ideas, and feelings are respected.

Make a smooth transition: A smooth bedtime routine can help you end your day with a feeling of harmony. However, for many parents, bedtime is a source of conflict. Most of the problems that arise are a result of not giving children sufficient opportunity to make the transition from “waking mode” to “sleeping mode.” Just as people need time in the morning to wake up, they also need time in the evening to slow down and prepare for sleep. Often, however, parents don’t give children time to make this transition, and they create conflict by trying to force them to make the shift at the last minute. If you want your child to go to bed at 8:00, you can’t stay busy until 7:45
and expect your child to be quietly lying in bed at 8:00. At about 7:00, you should set aside what you are doing and begin the bedtime routine. By giving yourself and your child sufficient time in the evening, you provide an opportunity for quiet talk and a feeling of closeness as your child gradually prepares for sleep.

**Focus on activities with value:** After bathing and brushing teeth, take some quiet time for sharing, chatting, and reading aloud. Bedtime stories should be chosen carefully, leaving your child relaxed and open rather than revved up for action. You may spend this time in your child’s room or in a special chair elsewhere. If you do it elsewhere, your child will still need to transition into the bedroom sometime during the routine. Once your child is in bed, you may want to sing one or two quiet bedtime songs to soothe them in preparation for sleep.

Bedtime is a perfect time to focus on things that have a broader perspective or a deeper significance than the little concerns of the day. At the close of the day, there is a natural tendency to want to put everything in perspective, to consider something more meaningful than whether our children have learned their multiplication tables. At this time of the day, we tend to be inclined to consider the more intangible and enduring aspects of our lives, and children feel the same need. Simple conversations that arise at bedtime, as children (and parents) reflect on things that they have experienced during the course of the day, are often a wonderful way to connect with each other and with the inner values you share.

This process can be helped by reading or telling stories that have a timeless value, such as the great myths, legends, fables, and fairy tales that have been handed down from generation to generation. Stories such as these contain profound messages and enable children to experience the deeper aspects of life. This creates an opportunity to appreciate and enjoy each other as loving human beings who are sharing a journey of discovery together.

**Creating a Supportive Homeschooling Environment**

We offer the following discussions to families who are beginning to think about creating a new learning environment in the home. While much of the following may seem to be common sense, we all need reminders to reconnect with the simple elements of creating a nurturing home for young children. It is easy to be lured by the “more is better” culture; we all end up with toy rooms overstuffed with toys, with videos and games that overstimulate, and with a weekly to-do list that feels more like a circus than a schedule. Yet, when considering introducing the new elements of homeschooling, it is important to look at your home environment with fresh eyes.

This is a great opportunity to make any changes and adjustments you have been intending to make. Even subtle or simple changes in the way a room is organized, or reducing the amount of screen time and overall media noise in your home, can have a renewing and enlivening effect on every family member. Young children are especially sensitive to these elements, and we encourage you to begin your homeschooling experience with a fresh start, an uncluttered space, and an open mind. Create a schedule that makes room for explorations and discoveries, and go forward into each day prepared to
stop and smell the roses (sometimes literally!) whenever a “teachable moment” presents itself. In many ways, every moment is a learning moment.

**Imitation Activities**

Children in the first stage of development learn naturally through imitation. If possible, provide opportunities each day for your child to imitate you in your “real work.” Children would much rather be involved in the regular activities of the household than have life revolve around them. When we include our children in the daily activities of life, allowing them to work side by side with us instead of focusing all our attention on them, they learn essential tasks at their own pace, developing practical skills without feeling pressured to perform. When parent and child work together, a harmonious flow is established between them, which results in a deeper bond.

However, it is not enough to tell a child something—children need to be shown, and they need to have the supporting presence of the parent to help them maintain focus. What young children want most of all is simply to be with the parent and to be included in the parent’s activities. The kitchen, with its daily bustle, is an excellent place to begin. Children love to help wash the fruits and vegetables for a meal, and they are capable of cutting them when shown how to do so safely. Kneading bread is a fun activity for children to dig their hands into, and they enjoy shaping their own little loaves or forming the bread into animal, letter, and number shapes.

Include your child when setting the table. Mealtimes become very special when you create a ritual. You may wish to have cloth place mats and napkins and to make napkin rings for each member of the family (a fun craft project to do with your child!). When flowers are in season, your child can pick some to put on the table. When care is brought to the presentation of the meal, your child is often able to eat in a calm and slow manner, and many problems associated with mealtimes may thus be avoided. Good manners flow more naturally when care is taken with the arrangement of the table and the family is calm and focused. Offering a special thanks for the food can be part of creating a special atmosphere.

After the meal, you can wash and dry dishes together. Ask your child to help put away the silverware in the proper slots. Buy your child a small broom so they can sweep the floor with you. When you make the beds, ask your child to get on one side of the bed with you on the other to help you pull up the sheet, blanket, and bedspread. Children love to fold clothes. Dish towels, washcloths, socks, and other small items are perfect for little hands. Teach your child to match socks and to stack the towels by color. All sorting and matching activities help build math and reading readiness.

No matter the task, your child will enjoy working alongside you when you bring an upbeat attitude to the task. If you give your child a directive to clean up and you do not participate, however, they will most likely balk at the idea. Children want to do things with parents—this is the key.

**Creative Play**

Is your house overflowing with games, toys, books, stuffed animals, paper, and bits and pieces of everything in between? Such spaces occur naturally and are the result of healthy, creative activity. Yet
too much stuff can make individual toys inaccessible, and the overall scene of piles upon piles of treasures can be quite uninspiring and overwhelming. You may consider doing a thorough organization before beginning your homeschooling experience. One method is to have a “50 Percent Reduction” day, where just about half of everything is carefully put away into boxes and stored for another day. (Labeling the boxes is a great idea!) Do you have five puzzles out? Put away two or three for now. Do you have a dozen stuffed animals in an overflowing basket? Choose six to keep and six to take a break (“take a vacation”). Clearing out and bringing order to the physical spaces of play and learning can have a positive, refreshing influence on children and parents alike.

Once everything is organized and accessible, creative play often emerges naturally from the events of your day, from the stories your child hears and from the experiences they have. Playing house or store, dressing up and acting out stories, building with blocks, and other such activities can easily be an extension of your focused main lesson times, and your child will often happily engage in these activities for an extended time without your active involvement.

The following is a list of classic creative play ideas.

**Play dress-up:** Children love to wear “big people clothes” so they can pretend to be the mommy or daddy, storekeeper, doctor, nurse, police officer, firefighter, and so on. They also like trying out all sorts of creative outfits. Thrift stores and garage sales are great places to find interesting garments and accessories for your costume box. Hats, gloves, shoes, silky things that can be draped, costume jewelry of all kinds, old neckties, and shawls can all be part of a well-stocked costume box.

**Play store with real food:** Cans of food, a small bag of popcorn, a box of uncooked pasta, or small unopened packages of beans and other foods can stock the “store” shelves, and play money (or real coins) can make the experience more real for your child. Also, you can use empty food boxes and cans, taping up the lids so they can be safely used for a pretend store.

**Play house:** Use a large cloth thrown over a table or an arrangement of chairs to create a cozy pretend house. Making a house out of a large box (ask your local refrigerator or washing machine dealer) is also fun. Cut out windows and doors, and paint the outside of the house with shutters around the windows, flowers growing around the edges, or any decorations that strike your child’s fancy.

**Block play:** A set of plain wooden blocks in basic shapes—squares, rectangles, round “towers,” etc.—offers endless possibilities. Blocks that are of consistent and relative sizes (“unit” blocks that show two square blocks equal one rectangular block, or two triangular
blocks equal one square block) are excellent for developing an awareness of mathematical relationships. By simply playing with these blocks, children become comfortable and familiar with simple concepts of addition and subtraction, comparison and sequencing, and many other important ideas. Large cardboard “bricks” are also excellent building blocks, and they can be used to create very tall towers and entire castles. They are lightweight and easy to stack, and they won’t hurt little toes when they fall down.

While small interlocking plastic blocks (like LEGO and DUPLO) are a great hit with children and can lead to hours of imaginative play, we encourage you to provide a sturdy set of wooden blocks. There is a big difference in the feel, sound, and experience of using wooden blocks as opposed to plastic blocks. Although wooden blocks are especially helpful for small children to use, they will undoubtedly be used throughout the years for larger constructions by children of all ages.

**Toys from nature:** As the year progresses, you can develop collections of nature items. Shells, stones, nuts, pine cones, and other materials from nature can be kept in small baskets in an easy-to-reach place. Your child will naturally gravitate to playing with them in an amazing variety of ways.

**Handwork:** Keep beeswax and clay handy. Make your own modeling dough (two recipes are provided here) in addition to using purchased clay. Materials for handwork (yarn, felt, construction paper and other interesting papers, scissors, glue, craft sticks, etc.) can be kept on a low shelf, easily available whenever needed.

**Grinding grain:** Put wheat berries or dried corn in an old-fashioned manual coffee grinder and let your child grind it into flour. Store wheat flour or cornmeal in a jar until there are several cups and then make bread together.

**Scarf play:** Large silk or cotton scarves are wonderful for creative play. Children love to wrap themselves in the scarves, use them as capes, or dance with them. They can be used to create forts and houses or to lay the foundation for a farm or water scene on the floor. You can simply buy large pieces of light, silky fabric and place them in a basket near the play area.

**Sand play:** All that is needed is a pile of sand and some natural materials such as branches, leaves, small sticks, stones, acorns or other seed pods, grass, etc. Containers and “diggers” of different sizes and shapes (from thimble and spoon to bucket and shovel) and a bucket of water will allow your child endless possibilities. A “drip castle” can be made by mixing a soggy mixture of water and sand, scooping up small handfuls of it, and then allowing it to drip down into a pile, adding to it bit by bit as it grows into an unusual castle.
Assessment Measures in First Grade

Assessments in the early grades are done through informal observation, the creation of a portfolio of student work, and end-of-year activities that are designed to evaluate your child's learning. It might be helpful to take daily or weekly notes in order to document your child's progress—you can use your weekly planner and the learning assessment form for this. Things that would be important to note are what aspects are challenging or difficult, what aspects your child has a natural affinity for, what questions they bring to you throughout the day, what new ideas spring up during the course of the week, and what new discoveries or progress on a skill were made. These notes will help you keep track of your child's progress and know where and when extra help is needed.

Educators use both formative and summative assessments to gauge student learning and track it over time, and this course is designed for you to do the same. Formative assessment happens each week, “forming” as you watch your child work. Each week you will notice when they struggle, where more time is needed to grasp a concept or practice using a new skill, and which aspects of the work are particularly enjoyable or easy. These observations will help inform your next steps. Using ongoing formative assessments, your teaching can adapt to your child's needs as the year unfolds. Summative assessment provides a summary of your child's learning at a particular point, usually at the end of the year. Summative assessments are often in the form of a test, but in first grade, of course, our year-end assessment will be presented in the same playful manner that you will use throughout the year with your lesson work.

It is important to remember that the development of young children changes very rapidly at times and seems to make no progress at other times. It is reminiscent of the way flowers grow: in spring, there is an abundance of growth, and in the winter, it's hard to imagine the bounty and beauty of the budding and flowering of the plants. Yet, each spring and summer, it happens again. Human beings might be on a different time rhythm (with growth happening more often than once a year!), but it's a similar principle. Human growth and development reflects a spiral process. Each time you return to a particular idea or topic, you come back to a similar point, but it's in a bigger circle than before, with a more far-reaching and encompassing sense of understanding. Remembering this can help you observe the natural progress of your child and not try to force learning or growth to happen. We wouldn't try to make a child grow faster! We respect and trust that each child will grow at their own pace. Likewise, learning happens at its own pace. Learning is a natural process for most children and takes a lot of patience, courage, and trust in the adults around them to give them the time to unfold their potential.

Assessing your child's progress will become a natural part of your work each week. As the months pass, you will begin to understand how far your child has come. Keeping anecdotal notes throughout the year will provide you with a comprehensive picture of your child's development. There is a more formal
(summative) assessment in the last lesson to look at where your child is in their development at the end of the first-grade year. While skills and capacities will continue to develop, the year-end assessment provides a picture of your child's progress.

**Information for Students Enrolled in Oak Meadow School**

If you enroll your child, you will benefit from regular feedback and support from your Oak Meadow teacher. Your Oak Meadow teacher is also available to help with questions you may have about assignments or about your child's progress. Communication is essential to developing a great relationship with your teacher during the school year.

If you are enrolled in Oak Meadow School, you'll find a reminder at the end of each lesson that instructs you on how to document your child's progress and when to submit their work to your Oak Meadow teacher. Continue working on your next lessons while you are waiting for your teacher to send feedback on your child's work. After you have submitted the first 18 lessons, you will receive a first-semester evaluation and grade. At the end of 36 lessons, you will receive a final evaluation and grade.

**Submitting Work to Your Oak Meadow Teacher**

You are welcome to submit your child's work using email, Google docs, or postal mail. You will find detailed instructions on how to submit your work in *Oak Meadow Parent Handbook*.

Here are a few tips:

- Please make sure to carefully label each submission. Teachers receive many submissions each week, and we want to make sure your child's work is accounted for.

- If you send work through the postal mail, be sure to include a self-addressed, stamped envelope so your teacher can return the work to you. Receiving the return package from your teacher is an exciting part of the distance-learning relationship for many children, and we want to make sure the materials make it back to you in a timely manner. Because regular postal mail is not tracked, it's important to keep copies of everything you send.

- If you choose to send work digitally, Microsoft Word documents, a shared Google doc, and Adobe Acrobat PDFs are the easiest formats for our teachers to work with. When in doubt, please check in with your teacher to determine the best format for receiving work.

- It is a good idea to keep a dated log of the lessons you send to your teacher by keeping track of what has been submitted and returned. With so many important pieces of work going back and forth, mistakes do occur, and a good record-keeping system helps clear things up. Please use the weekly planner for this purpose.
When both the family and the teacher keep to a regular schedule for submitting and returning lessons, everyone benefits, especially your child. Timely feedback, encouragement, and guidance from a teacher are key elements for all learners, and this is especially important in distance learning.

One of the most common questions parents have at the beginning of the year is how much work to send to the teacher and what should be included in the monthly submission. Your teacher will want to see a representative sample of work that includes something from each lesson. You can use the learning assessment form at the end of each lesson to help you determine the skills that your teacher is particularly interested in seeing demonstrated. You will want to include work that you feel gives the best picture of your child’s progress and shows areas or skills that they are working on or that you may have questions about. In addition, you are encouraged to include anything that you think your teacher will particularly enjoy or benefit from seeing. If you have written notes on your weekly planner and the learning assessment form at the end of each lesson, you may want to include those as well. If you have any questions about what to send or not send, your teacher is happy to advise you.

**Ready to Begin**

We believe that childhood is a valuable period, and nothing is gained by hurrying through it. We suggest that you relax and enjoy these lessons with your child, using them as a springboard to further explorations and an opportunity to spend many enjoyable hours together.
In a faraway land in a time gone by, there lived a rich old man who owned a mill. All the people of the village worked at the mill. Now it came to pass that the old man's health was failing and so he called a meeting to which everyone was invited.

When all the people were in the meeting hall, the old man stood up and said, “Good Townspeople, I am a very old man and I am sick. I do not know how much longer I will live. After much thought, I have decided to close the mill.”

A hush fell on the crowd as they heard the words that were spoken. When he was done, they all asked at once, “What will become of us when you close the mill? We will all be out of work! Oh dear! This is terrible news indeed!”

“Please,” said the old man, “I do not wish for you to lose your jobs. I have tried to find someone to buy the mill, but these are hard times, and no one has enough money. I am sorry, but I will have to close the mill in two weeks.”

The townspeople were angry and scared. They didn’t like losing their jobs. Without jobs, how would they support their families?

The next day, the whole village seemed to be thinking about the old man’s announcement. They went about their work at the mill with long faces and no smiles were seen anywhere.

On Saturday morning, as the townspeople gathered at the well to draw water, a woman walked into town and stood on the rock at the center of town. “Good people, may I have a word with you? I have come from far away and I would like to help you.”

“Do you think she has come to buy the mill?” asked several people.

“She doesn’t look like she could afford to buy anything!” snickered some boys.
The mysterious woman continued, “In yonder field, filled with haystacks, I will hide a magic spindle. At seven o’clock Monday morning, before you go to work at the mill, I invite you to come to the field and search for the spindle. The lucky person who finds it will be richly rewarded, for the magic spindle knows how to spin straw into gold!”

The townspeople were surprised by the unknown woman’s unusual invitation. Who was she and where had she come from? Did she really have a magic spindle that could turn straw into gold?

Several people in the crowd were greedy and were thinking that if they got there earlier than the others, say at six o’clock rather than seven, perhaps they would find the magic spindle first and have all the gold for themselves. Other people were thinking about what they would buy with all the gold they would soon have.

As the sun rose on Monday, the greedy townsfolk who had arrived early were each surprised to see others besides themselves who had tried to get there first. They ran all over the field, swatting at haystacks and pushing them over, looking for the magic spindle and finding nothing.

By seven o’clock when the honest townspeople arrived along with the mysterious woman, the field was half demolished, and the early comers were angry that they had not found the magic spindle. “We don’t believe you, woman!” one man cried angrily. “You have tricked us! There is no magic spindle in any of these haystacks. You are trying to make a laughingstock out of us!” The people who had come early stumped out of the field in a rage, feeling as if they had been betrayed.

After they were gone, the woman smiled and held one finger up to the sky and another toward the earth. She blinked three times, then turned to the waiting crowd and announced, “The magic spindle has now been placed in one of the haystacks in this field. Good luck to each of you! Remember that it is a magic spindle and will spin all this straw into gold!”

The people quickly spread out over the entire field and began rummaging through the haystacks. Off to the side, the woman noticed a ragged little girl with eyes the color of the clear blue sky and hair the color of spun gold, dirty though it was. She was watching her poor mother look for the magic spindle in haystack after haystack. The mother was dreaming of all the fine things she could buy with the gold. As she searched frantically, images filled her mind. She imagined beautiful dresses, a handsome carriage with white horses, a large castle on the hill, and servants to do all the work. Similar thoughts filled the minds of each of the people as they burrowed through the hay in hopes of being the one to find the magic spindle.

Suddenly, the ragged little girl noticed a small mound of hay in the far corner, where someone had already knocked the top of a haystack off in their hurried search for the spindle. She ran straight to the tiny pile of hay. She reached into the center of the mound and her hand touched something that didn’t feel like hay. Could it be? Had she found it? As she slowly removed her hand, she found herself looking at the most beautiful spindle she had ever seen. She started to dance and skip around the pile of hay that had held the special treasure. Her mother came to her, and soon all the townspeople were gathered around the child, to see what she had found.

“Oh, it is beautiful!” exclaimed one young woman.
“Absolutely magnificent!” an old man admired.

“You will be rich! What will you do with all the gold you will have, child?” asked several people at once.

“All I want is for everyone to be happy again. I will buy the mill for the town and everyone will be able to keep their jobs forever.”

At this moment, the wise, mysterious woman came up and spoke to the girl’s mother. “You have a very special daughter, for she is able to think of others besides herself. She has a very good heart and she is your greatest treasure.”

Then she turned to the girl and whispered something in her ear. The child placed the magic spindle on the hay in front of her and blinked three times. Instantly, the spindle began to whir and spin. Everyone looked on in amazement as pile after pile of straw was spun into gold. Such a sight as this no one had ever seen before!

That afternoon, the little girl bought the mill from the old miller and placed it in the hands of the townspeople. Everyone was so grateful to the child for saving their jobs and the mill that they carved a statue of her sitting by a haystack in the center of town. They also built a new cottage for the little girl and her mother. The townspeople never saw the mysterious woman again, and to this day, they don’t know who she was or where she came from.

The Bear’s Child Lesson 1

by Theresa Davis

Many years ago in a tiny village nestled in a valley, there lived a little boy named Jonathan. From every window in his house, he could look up at the great mountains that towered over the village.

Jonathan’s beloved grandfather lived in a little hut halfway up the mountain. On warm, sunny days Jonathan would climb the steep trail up the mountain to visit his grandfather. Together they would sit in the flower-filled meadows, or climb the peaks to see the hawks soaring high above. Sometimes they would lie on their backs in the soft grass and tell stories until the afternoon sun hung low in the sky. Jonathan loved his grandfather very much, and he liked to be with him more than anyone else in the world.

Jonathan was very proud of his parents, who were the healers for the village. His father was a kind doctor who knew much about helping people get well. His mother was a sweet, caring woman who collected the herbs that grew wild at the edge of the forest. Sometimes Jonathan helped her gather the plants. His mother used the herbs to make teas and medicines to help those who were ill.

One night, Jonathan’s family was awakened from a deep sleep by a loud banging on the door. A large man burst through the door, carrying his sick daughter. She was a little girl Jonathan had played with.
many times in front of the market stands while their mothers shopped. But now she was so sick that Jonathan hardly recognized her. Jonathan’s mother and father rushed to care for the sick child.

Within minutes, others began arriving at the doctor’s house. Everyone soon realized that many of the townspeople had been stricken with a terrible illness. Jonathan’s mother immediately set to work cooking herbs to make a special medicine. She found one particular plant that seemed to help the sick people.

As the hours went on, more and more people became sick. Soon, Jonathan’s parents used up all the special herbs his mother had collected. The boy’s father said, “Jonathan, we need you to go out of the village and into the forest to collect as many of the special herbs as you can. Come back quickly, as there are many sick people in the village who need our help.”

Jonathan felt very important as he slipped his mother’s woven basket over his arm. He ran out of the village as fast as he could go. Right at the edge of the forest, he found the plants his parents had described to him. He was very happy that he was going to be able to help the townspeople.

Quickly, he began picking the plants, and soon his basket overflowed with healing herbs. As he was glancing about to see if there were more herbs within easy reach, he felt someone or something watching him. When he looked up, his heart began to pound with fear, for before him stood an enormous bear with very sharp teeth and big sharp claws. The bear looked Jonathan up and down, as if to say, “How many bites could I get out of you?” and then, quick as a flash, took a swipe toward him.

Jonathan closed his eyes and prepared for the worst.

He felt a big whoosh of air, but that was all. He opened his eyes in time to see the huge bear grab the basket of herbs and lumber quickly off into the forest. Jonathan was so shocked that at first he couldn’t even believe what had happened. He was certainly glad the bear hadn’t eaten him! But now he needed to collect more herbs as fast as possible, before the bear had a chance to return! He took off his jacket in order to begin filling it with healing plants, but to his dismay, he discovered that there were no more of the special herbs to be found. He had picked them all!

When Jonathan realized that the bear had stolen the very last of the herbs, he became angry. “Why would a bear want to take herbs?” he wondered aloud. “I need those herbs to save the lives of all the sick people in the village!” He spent nearly an hour wandering around the meadow, desperately searching for another patch of the special herbs. But there were none to be found. At last, he realized that he would have to go after the bear.

As Jonathan walked deep into the forest, a chill went down his spine. The forest was filled with shadows, and it had a damp, dark smell that felt strange to his nose. He felt colder and colder as he walked farther into the forest. He followed the path along the edge of the stream, and suddenly he saw an enormous paw print in the wet earth. It was the bear, all right!

Everything inside Jonathan wanted to run back to the village, but instead, he grabbed a big stick so he could protect himself. He tried not to think about the bear’s sharp teeth and claws, but sometimes he couldn’t help himself as he continued through the forest.
When he had walked so far and looked so long that he was about to give up, Jonathan spotted a tiny red bird. The bird chirped and seemed to say, “Follow me! Follow me!” So Jonathan followed the little bird, and soon found himself at the mouth of a cave. There were many large paw prints at the mouth of the cave, and Jonathan knew he had found the bear’s home.

He waited outside, listening for any sound of the bear. After hearing only silence, he decided to take a look inside the cave. Once his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he spotted his mother’s woven basket on the floor, with his mother’s special healing herbs still safely inside. The bear must have brought it back to the cave and dropped it. Jonathan didn’t waste any time. He reached down to grab the basket. Just as he was lifting it, he heard an enormous growl behind him. The bear had returned to the cave, and now Jonathan was trapped!

The boy froze in fright, dropping his stick in his panic. The bear growled again, just inches from Jonathan’s face. Then it walked around him, farther into the cave. For the first time, Jonathan saw two little bear cubs lying on the floor of the cave. They looked very sick and weak, and lay listlessly on the soft dirt, not even looking up to greet their mother as she nudged them gently.

At last, Jonathan understood that the bear meant him no harm, but only wanted to help her babies. He bravely looked right into the eyes of the mother bear, and grabbed the basket of herbs. He pulled out several of the plants and broke them into little pieces. Gently, he pried open the jaws of the bear cubs, and placed pieces of the herbs in their mouths. He tickled their throats to make them swallow. The bear softly growled, seeming to understand, and did not interfere. Jonathan hesitated, wanting to be sure the cubs would get well. Once again, he stuffed their mouths with healing herbs, and this time, the cubs began to chew on their own, as if they knew this was what they needed to grow strong and healthy once more.

Jonathan knew that time was running out for the sick people in the village. Glancing one last time at the mother bear and her cubs, who looked at him gratefully with their big black eyes, he left the cave, the basket held tightly in his hand. He raced through the dark woods, through the grassy meadow, through the village, and back through the door of his house.

His mother looked relieved to see him. “We’ve been so worried!” she cried as she hugged him. “You’ve been gone for hours!”

“I ran into some trouble, but I made it,” Jonathan replied. “Here are the herbs you need.”

“You’re just in time,” said his father as he began preparing the herbs. “Why don’t you go help care for the patient in the back room?”


“When you’re feeling better, Grandpa, I’ll tell you the whole story,” said Jonathan as he held his grandfather’s hand.
Jonathan knew that his grandfather and the little girl from the market would get well. He knew there would be plenty of herbs to help all the sick people of the village. He knew that the two little bear cubs in the cave in the forest would be all right too. And he felt warm and happy inside because he had been able to help.

Dick Whittington and His Cat  Lesson 2

In the reign of the famous King Edward III, there was a little boy named Dick Whittington, whose father and mother died when he was very young, so that he remembered nothing at all about them, and was left a ragged little fellow, running about a country village. As poor Dick was not old enough to work, he was in bad shape; but he begged for scraps from the people who lived in the village and they usually came up with potato peelings or a hard crust of bread for him.

For all this, Dick Whittington was a very sharp boy, and he was always listening to what everybody said. On Sundays, he was sure to hear the folks as they stood around in the churchyard and talked. On market day, you could see little Dick leaning against the signpost of the village alehouse, where people stopped to eat and drink as they came from the next town to market. And when the barber’s shop door was open, Dick listened to all the news that the customers told one another.

In this manner, Dick heard a great many very strange things about the great city of London. The foolish country people at that time thought folks in London were all fine gentlemen and ladies, that there was singing and music all day long, and the streets were all paved with gold!

One day, a large wagon and eight horses drove through the village while Dick was standing by the signpost. He thought this wagon must be going to the fine town of London, so he gathered his courage and asked the driver to let him walk along with the wagon. When the driver heard that Dick was a poor orphan, he agreed to let him ride on the seat next to him all the way to London.

I do not know how little Dick managed to get food and water along the way, or where he slept at night when the wagon stopped at an inn. Perhaps some kindhearted people in the towns he passed through gave him something to eat and drink, and maybe the driver let Dick sleep on one of the soft, cushiony seats inside the wagon at night.

Dick got safely to London, however, and was in such a hurry to find the streets of gold that he forgot to say goodbye to the kindly driver. Instead, he ran off as fast as his legs would carry him, darting down streets in search of riches. Poor boy! He ran until he was too tired to move. He was so disappointed to see only dirt in the streets where he had thought he would surely find gold, that he cried himself to sleep in a dark corner.
In the morning, he tried to beg for money to buy food, but no one paid him any mind. Soon, he became quite weak from hunger. At last a good-natured gentleman saw how hungry he looked. “Why don't you go to work, my lad?” said he to Dick.

“That I would, but I do not know how,” answered the boy.

“If you are willing to work, come along with me,” said the gentleman, and took him to a hayfield, where Dick worked and lived happily and had plenty to eat until the hay was made.

After this, he was as poor as before, and after wandering around the city, he collapsed on the doorstep of Mr. Fitzwarren, a rich merchant. He was noticed by the cook, who was an ill-tempered creature who told him to move along or she would pour hot dishwater on him.

Just then, Mr. Fitzwarren came home. Seeing the dirty, ragged boy on the doorstep, he said to him, “Why do you lie there, my boy? You seem old enough to work; you must be a lazy boy.”

“No, indeed, sir,” said Dick to him, “that is not true. I would work if I could, but I do not know anybody to ask for a job and I am hungry and weak now and can't get up.”

Being a good man, Mr. Fitzwarren ordered him to be taken into the house, given a good dinner, and kept around to do what dirty work he could for the cook. This would have been a nice arrangement except for the ill-natured cook, who found fault and scolded Dick from morning to night. She would often beat him with a broom for no good reason. At last, word of her abuse of Dick reached Miss Alice, Mr. Fitzwarren’s daughter, who told the cook she must watch her mouth and her behavior toward the boy or she could find another job.

It worked for a while. Now that the cook was treating Dick a little more kindly, he had another problem to solve. His bed was in an attic that had so many mice and rats that every night he was tormented by the rodents and had trouble sleeping. One day, a gentleman paid him for shining his boots and so Dick went in search of a cat he could buy with his penny. When he saw a girl with a cat, he asked if she would sell it to him for a penny and she agreed. As she handed over the cat, she told Dick the cat was an excellent mouser.

Dick hid the cat in his attic and brought her scraps from his own dinner. In a short time, he had no more trouble with the rats and mice, and slept quite soundly at night.

One day, Mr. Fitzwarren announced that he was putting together a ship that would sail to foreign shores to trade goods. He thought all his servants should have some chance for good fortune as well as himself, so he called them all together and asked them what they would send on the ship to trade. They all had something they were willing to venture except poor Dick, who had neither money nor goods and therefore could send nothing.

When Miss Alice offered to put in something for him, her father rejected the kind gesture, saying that it must be something of his very own. At this, Dick remembered his cat and reluctantly offered her for the voyage.

“Fetch your cat then, my good boy,” said Mr. Fitzwarren, “and bid her farewell.”
Dick went upstairs and brought down his little cat, and with tears in his eyes, gave her to the captain. He would miss her terribly, and he knew the mice and rats would bother him again now that she was gone. Seeing how sad he was, Miss Alice gave him a penny to buy another cat.

This and many other acts of kindness by Miss Alice made the ill-tempered cook jealous of poor Dick and she began to mean to him again, worse than before. At last, he could take no more. He packed his few things and started off early one morning. He walked as far as Holloway and sat down on a stone, which to this day is called Whittington's Stone, and began to think about which road he should take from there.

While he was thinking about what he should do, the bells of Bow Church began to ring, and he fancied their sound said to him, “Turn back, Whittington, Lord Mayor of London.”

“Lord Mayor of London!” said he to himself. “Why, to be sure I would put up with almost anything now to be Lord Mayor of London one day and ride in a fine coach! Well, I will go back and think nothing of the cook’s ill treatment if I am to be Lord Mayor of London at last.”

Dick went back to Mr. Fitzwarren’s home and arrived before anyone noticed he had been gone. He set to work with new excitement, dreaming of the day he would be Lord Mayor.

The ship with the cat on board had been a long time at sea and was at last driven by the winds to the Barbary Coast, where the Moorish people lived. The English had never seen Moors before and neither had the Moors seen the English. The Moors came in great numbers to see the sailors who came from so far away, and they treated them well. As the two groups became better acquainted, the Moors were eager to buy the fine things from the ship.

The captain took some samples of his finest goods to the King of Barbary. The king and queen were delighted to receive such unusual visitors and goods, and they called for a feast to be prepared. The platters of fine foods were brought in and placed in the center of the room. It was not long before a large number of rats and mice rushed in, helping themselves from almost every dish. The captain was amazed and asked the king if this happened all the time.

“Oh yes,” said the king, “they are very troublesome and destructive, indeed. I would give half of my treasure to be freed of them, for they not only destroy my dinner, but also attack me in bed. I am so afraid of them, I have a guard watch me all night while I sleep so that no rodents attack me.”

Remembering Dick Whittington’s cat, the captain said he had a creature on board the ship that would rid the palace of these vermin in no time. The king’s heart leaped so high at the happiness this news gave him that his turban dropped off his head. “Bring this creature to me,” commanded the king, “and I will load your ship with gold and jewels in exchange for her.”

The captain’s mate hurried to fetch the cat while another feast was being prepared in the palace kitchen. When he returned with the cat, she took one look at the table full of rats and sprang into action. In a few minutes, she had downed most of the rodents. Those remaining alive scampered off to their holes in fear.
The king and queen were delighted by this little creature who had done them such a great service and asked for her to be brought up to them. The queen was concerned about touching a creature who had just killed so many mice and rats, but when the captain stroked the cat's head and said, "Nice pussy," the queen reached out and patted her head, saying, "Nite putty," for English was new to her. The captain put the cat down in the queen's lap, where she curled up and purred herself to sleep.

The king traded with the captain for the entire ship's cargo. He kept his word and loaded the ship with riches in exchange for the cat, whose kittens would soon provide the whole country with cats, and rid the place of rats. The ship set sail for England on the next morning's tide, and catching a good tailwind, they quickly arrived back in London.

The captain made haste to Mr. Fitzwarren's shipping office to bring him the good news of the prosperous voyage. Mr. Fitzwarren was delighted, and when he heard what had happened, he called his servants to the office and said, "Go fetch Mr. Whittington."

At that moment, Dick was scouring pots for the cook. When they brought him to the office and offered him a chair, he thought they were going to make fun of him, and he begged them not to play tricks.

"Indeed, Mr. Whittington," said Mr. Fitzwarren, "we are quite serious and have good news for you from the ship's captain. He traded your cat to the King of Barbary and in return, brought you more riches than I possess in the whole world. I hope you may live long and enjoy them to the fullest!"

When Dick saw the great treasure that now belonged to him, he hardly knew how to contain his joy. He begged his master to take what he pleased, since he owed his good fortune to his kindness. But Mr. Fitzwarren refused, saying it was all his and he was sure Dick would use it well.

Dick next asked Mrs. Fitzwarren and then Miss Alice to accept a part of his good fortune, but they would not, telling him they felt great joy at his success. The good fellow was too kindhearted to keep it all to himself, so he made presents for the captain, the mate, the rest of Mr. Fitzwarren's servants, and even for the ill-natured old cook.

After this, Mr. Fitzwarren advised him to send for a tailor to make him a suit appropriate for a gentleman. He told Dick he was welcome to continue living in his house until Dick could buy one of his own.

When Dick was bathed, his hair curled, and proper clothes put on, he was as handsome as any young man in London. Miss Alice was smitten, and the two soon became sweethearts. It wasn't long before a wedding was announced.

History tells us that Mr. Whittington and his lady lived in great splendor and were very happy. They had several children. He became the Sheriff of London, and also Lord Mayor. It is known that he also received the honor of knighthood by King Henry V.

A carved stone figure of Sir Richard Whittington with his cat in his arms was displayed until the year 1780 over the archway of the old prison of Newgate that stood across Newgate Street in London.
On the edge of a large old forest, there lived a farmer and his wife and their two children, Jordan and Maria. For seven years, there had been very little rain and the farm was not doing well. The animals were thin and sickly and the fields were dry and barren. When it came time to go to market and sell their goods, they had little to take, and returned home with enough money to buy food for only one more week.

One evening after a meager meal of stale bread and water, they sat around the fire to talk. “We are down to our last pennies,” said the father, “and the land will produce no more crops until the rains come. I don’t know what to do.”

They all sat there feeling very sad. The one thing they all agreed on was that the family would stay together. They would help one another and find a way to get through this most difficult time.

The next day, Jordan and Maria decided to take a walk in the forest. They both felt very sad, but walking through the beautiful old trees always made them feel better. The birds began chirping cheerfully as they passed, as if to say, “Don’t worry—be happy! Life is beautiful!” They noticed the squirrels and chipmunks scampering skillfully from tree to tree, playing games of tag. Their comical antics prompted a much-needed fit of giggles in the children as they held their sides and rolled in the soft green moss and fallen leaves that littered the forest floor.

On hot summer days, sitting in the cool shade of the thick forest canopy had always been a favorite pastime for Jordan and Maria. After finishing their early-morning chores on the farm and helping their mother get the midday meal started, they frequently took the opportunity to go to their favorite place for a few minutes. It was magical indeed. There was a small pond with a seasonal assortment of birds who would stop to drink, sing a sweet song, and eat a few berries. Jordan had a special fondness for his feathered friends and he always kept a small journal and pencil with him to try and capture each one’s unique appearance. His book was filled with drawings of all kinds of interesting things he saw in the woods, not just birds.

Maria also loved the birds. She would spend hours trying to imitate the unique song of each one. There were times when Maria was sure she could understand what the birds were saying.

Jordan and Maria sat in the woods watching the animals go about their daily routine of gathering food, finding shelter, and, of course, playing. They loved to watch the graceful deer nimbly pick their way through the dense manzanita bushes that grew at the base of the tall pine and spreading oak trees. Gently, the doe would nibble at the manzanita berries, and show her fawn how to do the same. Then they would find a tender young tree and nibble some bark before taking a drink from the crystal clear pond.
stream that ran through the woods. All of the creatures seemed to lead such a carefree life in the forest, where everything they needed was right there.

In the twinkling of an eye, Maria had an idea that might save her family. She turned to Jordan and said, “If the animals of the forest can survive by eating berries and nuts, well, maybe we can too!” She was so excited! She was sure she had found the answer to her family’s problem.

Being older and more cautious by nature, Jordan asked, “But how will we know which ones to pick? What if some of the plants or berries are poisonous and we get sick?”

“Silly boy!” taunted Maria. “All we have to do is watch and learn from the animals! We’ll eat what they eat, and surely we won’t get sick.”

It sounded reasonable to Jordan, so they ran home to get their baskets and tell Mother and Father the good news.

“You expect us to eat bark and berries?” Mother asked after Maria told her of the wonderful idea. “Don’t you know that these things can make people sick? Why, some plants are very poisonous and can kill you if you eat them. Acorns are good for squirrels, but impossible for people to eat. I think it is a silly idea and I don’t think you should waste your time collecting things we can’t eat. We have enough grain left for only one more meal. I just don’t know what we will do after that.” Mother was crying as Maria kissed her gently. Maria then snatched two handmade baskets from the rafter where they hung above her bed. With Jordan close behind, Maria ran into the woods to gather wild edible plants so her family wouldn’t starve. Even if Mother didn’t think the food would be good, Maria knew in her heart just what she must do.

All that afternoon, Jordan and Maria watched the animals as they ate the berries, nuts, and seeds. They collected the same ones, being careful not to take more than they needed and to leave plenty for their animal friends. Deeper and deeper into the forest they went in search of food. At one point, Jordan asked, “Maria, do you know where we are? It seems we are lost.”

Maria, being very sure of herself, said, “We’ll find our way back, don’t worry, brother dear. Oh, look! There are lots of acorns and pine nuts!” and off she went.

It must have been several hours before the children felt they had enough to take home for a meal. But they had lost track of the time and suddenly realized the daylight was almost gone and they really had no idea where they were.

“We are lost and it is almost dark,” cried Maria. “I’m scared, Jordan. What are we going to do?”

After a quick moment, Jordan said, “Why, we can do what the animals do at night. If they are safe here in the deep woods, then we will be too. I can make a small fire, and we’ll make a bed of pine needles, leaves, and grass. We’ll find our way home in the morning.”

“And we can eat some of the things we collected today, for our meal!” said Maria, suddenly forgetting her fear. The thought of spending the night in the woods with her animal friends excited her.
Jordan made a little fire for warmth and they both collected soft fallen pine branches and dried leaves to make their beds for the night. Then they sat down to eat the goodies they had found in the forest that day. The berries were sweet and juicy and the nuts were tasty, but the acorns were impossible to chew. The children ate until they were satisfied, then fell fast asleep in their beds made of gifts from the forest floor. They slept soundly for most of the night, but as the sun rose, Maria suddenly awoke with a terrible stomachache. “Jordan, are you awake? I feel terrible!” moaned Maria.

“Me too,” cried Jordan.

“What could make my stomach hurt so badly?” Maria wondered.

“Do you think it was the food we ate last night?” asked Jordan, holding his stomach as he leaned forward.

“I don’t know. The animals eat it and they don’t get stomachaches,” said Maria. “Oooohhhhhhh, I wish Mother was here. She would know what to do.”

“We are really in trouble now. Here we are, sick and lost in the forest!” Jordan complained. “What are we going to do?”

“I think we should try to find our way home, Jordan,” Maria suggested.

So the brother and sister gathered up their things and slowly started walking in the direction they thought would lead them home.

Soon, they came to a stream and decided to follow it. After a while, Jordan spotted something. “Look, Maria, off in that clearing! It looks like a cottage!”

“Who would live way out here in the middle of the woods? Maybe it’s a witch or an evil sorcerer who bakes little kids into pies! Look at that huge oven next to the cottage!” exclaimed Maria.

Cautiously, they approached the charming little cottage with its beautiful garden filled with all kinds of flowers and plants.

As they neared the edge of the clearing, an old woman’s voice called out,

“Acorns and rosehips
Biscuits and brew
Things from the earth
I offer to you.”

Jordan and Maria looked at each other and shrugged. Just then, the old woman appeared in the doorway.

“Hello, children!” greeted the crone in a kind voice. “Are you lost?”

“Lost and sick too!” Jordan blurted out. “Who are you?”

“My name is Alexandra. And who might you be?” she asked.
“I’m Jordan and this is my sister, Maria. We went into the forest yesterday to gather wild things to eat because our family has no money to buy food, and we got lost. Then we slept in the forest last night and woke up this morning with bad stomachaches. I think it was something we ate.”

“Well, show me what you ate and maybe I can brew up a tea that will make you feel better.” Alexandra reached for the basket that Maria offered to her. “Ah, yes. I know just what will help you feel better. See that little plant at the corner of the house? Pick ten of the most tender leaves and bring them into the kitchen. We’ll make mint tea for you.”

Soon, the three new friends were sitting around a table sipping tea and enjoying the most delicious cakes the children had ever eaten. The children were already feeling much better and felt so lucky to have found this kind old woman in the middle of the forest. As they chatted, they asked Alexandra what she did all alone so far from town. She told them that she enjoyed the woods and loved to prepare good things to eat from its berries, nuts, and seeds. When she heard about their situation, she agreed to share her great wisdom with them so they could go back and help their family to survive. She showed them how to make the delicious little cakes they had eaten, called Johnny Cakes, from acorns prepared in a special way. She had recipes for delicious soups, breads, and even desserts that could be made from the gifts of the earth. She took them out to locate the things they needed, and then she showed them her huge oven. It was built from red clay bricks and had an enormous iron door shaped like a huge D. It had a large wooden handle and creaked when it opened on its huge iron hinges. Alexandra showed them how she built the fire below and let it get to just the right temperature before putting the raw cakes and breads inside to bake. The children were fascinated and learned quickly.

Soon, it was time to make their way home. Alexandra told them to follow the stream until it forked. At the fork, Jordan and Maria were to walk in the direction of the sun until they came to a large, very old oak tree. The lowest branch pointed in the direction of a path. That was the path that would take them home.

They said fond farewells and promised to return to visit Alexandra as often as they could. Maria’s basket was stuffed with samples of all the tasty foods they had learned to make and they were anxious to get home to tell their parents the good news. They followed Alexandra’s directions and soon found themselves home. Mother and Father were so happy to see them! They had been very worried when they hadn’t returned from the woods the day before, and they had searched the woods all night. Mother hugged and kissed them both. Then Maria showed Mother the goodies in her basket, and they all went in the kitchen to enjoy the treats and hear the story of how Jordan and Maria found a way to save their family from starvation.