



Mary and Her Little Lamb

Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow,
And everywhere that Mary went,
The lamb was sure to go.

He followed her to school one day;
That was against the rule;
It made the children laugh and play,
To see a lamb at school.

And so the teacher turned him out;
But still he lingered near,
And waited patiently about,
Till Mary did appear.

And then he ran to her, and laid
His head upon her arm,
As if he said, "I'm not afraid,
You'll keep me from all harm."

"What makes the lamb love Mary so?"
The eager children cry;
"O, Mary loves the lamb, you know,"
The teacher did reply.

"And you, each gentle animal
To you, for life, may bind,
And make it follow at your call,
If you are always kind."



Mary and Her Little Lamb (cont.)

Every school child has heard this rhyme, but did you know that there really was a Mary and she really did have a lamb? Here is the true story of this famous poem. In 1806 Mary Elizabeth Sawyer was born in Sterling, Massachusetts, on a farm where her family raised many animals. One cold morning, she went to the barn with her father and found that two lambs had been born in the night. One had been abandoned by its mother and was nearly dead of the cold and of starvation. She talked her father into letting her take the creature into the house. There she patiently warmed and fed the little lamb and by the next morning it could stand up. It learned to drink milk and would follow Mary around everywhere.

As the lamb grew, Mary regularly combed and bathed it and treated it much as a child today would treat a favorite puppy. Because there were not many children around for playmates, Mary used to dress the lamb in clothes and play with it like a doll.

When Mary was about nine years old, she and her brother Nat decided to take the lamb to school. As always, the lamb followed close behind her. When they got to school, Mary put the lamb under her chair and covered her with a blanket and it went to sleep. When the teacher called on Mary to come to the front of the room to read, there was a *clatter, clatter, clatter* and the lamb rose to go with her. Mary was mortified! The teacher, Miss Polly Kimball, laughed out loud, as did all of the children, but Mary was ashamed. The lamb spent the rest of the morning in a shed and Mary took her home at lunchtime.

John Roulstone had been visiting the school that morning and had heard about the incident with the lamb; the next day he arrived on horseback to give Mary a slip of paper that had the original three stanzas of the poem he had written.

Mary's lamb lived for several years and was regularly sheered for its wool. Mary's mother had knitted a pair of stockings from the lamb's fleece and years after the poem became famous, Mary donated these stockings to a group that was raising money to preserve the Old South Church in Boston. On small cards Mary wrote, "Knitted yarn from the first fleece of Mary's Little Lamb," followed by her signature, Mary E. Sawyer, and the date. Those cards, along with Mary's personal retelling of her famous story, helped to raise hundreds of dollars to preserve the church.

Those cards can still be seen at museums such as the Henry Ford museum in Michigan, and can be purchased at special antique auctions. The fun of Mary's lamb's adventure at school still lives on for children today.

By Mary Rose



Dear Parents

The first few lines of this nursery rhyme will be familiar, but did you know that there were five more stanzas and that this is a true story? Have fun as you and your child read this poem and article out loud. Like most poetry, this piece should be read more than once to truly appreciate the rhythm and enjoy the rhymes.

TIP OF THE WEEK

Please help your child read the poem at least three times, and then ask him or her to retell the story to you in his or her own words.

Retelling a story demonstrates comprehension, and many tests assess comprehension this way.

The question section of this activity asks students draw upon their personal experience with pets. If your child has never had a pet, help him or her answer the last question by talking about a friend's, neighbor's, or relative's pet and using that animal to write about.

The Questions

Please use more than one sentence to answer each of these questions:

1. Why did the lamb follow Mary everywhere she went? _____

2. What did the other children think about the lamb? How do you know? _____

3. Was it a good idea to take the lamb to school? Why? _____

4. On the back of this page, write a short paragraph about a time that you had a pet to take care of. Tell how you played with the pet and how you could tell that it liked you.

We have completed this assignment together.

Child's Signature

Parent's Signature