

## Grade 5 Narrative

### The Bread Lesson

My dad has watermelon-size biceps, a neck like an inner tube, and enormous, muscular hands that make him seem like he's always wearing baseball mitts. He doesn't seem like the kind of guy who would bake great bread, but he is and he does. Every Saturday he puts on his chef's apron, rolls up his sleeves, breaks out a bag of flour, and produces two loaves of homemade bread. When he's done, the whole house smells delicious, and I can't wait for a hot slice smothered with yellow, melting butter.

The rest of the week, Dad is a car mechanic, which involves lots of heavy lifting, tightening, unscrewing, shoving, shaking, yanking, and banging. People tend to think of their cars as metallic members of the family, so there's lots of pressure on Dad to make sure pumps pump, steering steers, and brakes brake. The shop where Dad works is understaffed, so he's under a lot of stress. Sometimes I worry he's going to overheat and blow a gasket or something, like some old car. I think Dad began baking bread to help him relax. I see him in the kitchen, working on a spongy hunk of dough—punching and pounding it into submission.

I've been feeling kind of stressed out myself since I found out I didn't qualify for the swim team. Now I'll have to wait a whole year to try out again; that might as well be a million years. Plus, I'm taking some tough classes this year, and my best friend moved away.

I think Dad knew I was feeling pressure. He sat next to me on the sofa last Saturday and asked me how things were going. I said OK, even though I didn't feel OK at all. He looked at me for a moment, then he said it was time for me to help. He got up from the sofa and headed to the kitchen.

I couldn't imagine what help I could offer. Still, I followed right behind him. Once we were standing by the counter, Dad gave me one of his old aprons. He slipped it on over my head and tied it in the back with such obvious pride that you'd think I was being knighted, which felt kind of silly but also kind of nice. I was being initiated as a bread-baker.

Next Dad got out his enormous stainless-steel mixing bowl, handed me a large wooden spoon, and told me to stir while he added the ingredients. He threw in a large handful of flour from a sack. A haze of flour dust began to hover in the air like fog. He then sprinkled salt into the bowl. Dad isn't big on measuring. He instinctively knows exactly how much of each ingredient to use, and the bread always turns out great. The entire operation was accomplished as if we were part of a NASA space launch. Flour? Check. Yeast? Check. Milk? Check. Sugar, shortening, and salt? Check, check, check.

When I had stirred the flour and milk mixture into a thick, gooey lump, Dad had me turn it over onto the countertop, which had been dusted with flour. Then he showed me how to knead the dough—repeatedly pushing away at the rubbery glob, stretching it out, pounding it,

and folding it in on itself. As I kneaded it, I felt the dough come to life beneath my hands. It took ten minutes and a surprising amount of energy to corral the unruly blob into a neat, round mass.

Next came the most difficult, and surprising, part: doing nothing. We put the dough back into the metal bowl. Then we waited for more than an hour for the dough to slowly swell up and double in size. Next we deflated the risen dough by punching it down. We divided it in two and waited for it to rise again. Afterward, we put the dough into pans and waited another hour for the dough to rise and double one last time. Dad said the waiting is always the hardest part because of the sharp, sweet smell coming from the yeast.

“It’s hard to resist putting the dough directly into the oven, but if you do, the loaves will be small, and the bread will be tough. The most important lesson of all is learning to be patient,” Dad explained.

While we waited, we sat and talked. Silence is a blank space that begs to be filled. It’s like the dough—it swells up and fills a room with emptiness unless you punch it down with words. It felt good to be still and listen to each other. It felt good to open up and share our thoughts. As the flour dust in the kitchen quietly settled, time seemed to slow down. The dough was going to rise at its own pace. We could do nothing to make it rise faster. As I accepted that, I stopped watching the clock and drumming my fingers on the tabletop. I started enjoying the quiet time with Dad. My father taught me how to bake bread, but I think I learned something more. I learned to appreciate the slowly ticking rhythm of time. I learned to relax and let the bread rise.

## Grade 5 Informational

### Venus Flytrap

Waiting, like a hunter in the Serengeti, the leaves of the Venus Flytrap are open wide, anticipating its next meal. Snap! In less than a second, the leaves close with an insect inside.

How does the Venus Flytrap know when to close? It has short, stiff hairs on the leaves that are sensitive. If the hairs are touched and bend, the leaves close, trapping the insect inside. At first, the leaves do not shut completely, allowing insects too small to provide food for the plant to escape. After a few minutes, the leaves close completely, forming an airtight seal. If the leaves trap something that is not food, like a rock, they will reopen in about twelve hours and spit it out.

The leaves of the Venus Flytrap squeeze tightly around the trapped food and release digestive juices. The juices dissolve the soft inner parts of the insect. The hard outer parts, called the exoskeleton, are not dissolved. After five to twelve days, the leaves reabsorb the digestive juices and reopen. The wind or rain removes the leftover parts of the insect that were not digested.

The Venus Flytrap can be found living in wet, muddy ground in a few areas of North and South Carolina. Greenhouses also grow the plants. Want to grow your own? You may want to place it inside an old aquarium or glass fish bowl and keep the roots wet. The plant likes to be warm and moist; it needs about two hours of sunlight each day. If you grow your plant inside, you will need to feed it live insects. A couple of flies or slugs each month are all that it needs to eat. If you plant it outside, it will trap food on its own.

Some people think the Venus Flytrap will eat any meat, but this is not true. If given hamburger, the plant will not digest the meat and it will usually die. If you're planning to use a Venus Flytrap to control the fly population in your house, you might invest in a fly swatter instead.