

Name: _____ Class: _____

The Little Girl Who Would Not Work

By Carolyn Sherwin Bailey
1906

Carolyn Sherwin Bailey (1875-1961) was the principal of an elementary school. She wrote stories for her students. In this retelling of an old fable, a little girl would rather play all day than work. As you read, take notes on the conversations that the little girl has with the creatures in nature.

- [1] There was once a little girl who loved to play all day out of doors among the flowers and the bees.

Her mother thought she would grow to be an idle¹ little girl if she played so much. "You are old enough to do some work, little daughter," she said. "Even when you are a tiny girl you can learn to be busy."

But the little girl said: "Oh, mother, I do not like to work. Please let me go to the woods and play just a little while before I do my tasks."

So her mother said she might play, but only for a little while.



["1913 Francis Luis Mora \(1874-1940\) American artist - The Toy Sailboat" by oldsailro is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.](#)

- [5] The child ran out of the house, and across the garden, and down to the woods as fast as her feet could carry her. As she hurried on, a Red Squirrel jumped across her path and the little girl said to him: "Red Squirrel, you don't have to work, do you? You may just play, and eat nuts from morning till night. Isn't that all?"

"Not work!" chattered the Red Squirrel. "Why, I am working now, and I worked all day yesterday, and all of the day before. I have a family living in the old oak tree, and I must store away nuts for the winter. I have no time to stop and play."

Just then a Bee came buzzing by and the little girl said: "Little Bee, do you have any work to do?"

"Work!" buzzed the Bee. "Why, I am always working, gathering sweets and making the honeycomb² for you. I have not time for play."

The little girl walked along very slowly, for she was thinking, and she saw an Ant, down in the path, carrying a very large crumb of bread.

1. **Idle (adjective):** avoiding work or lazy
2. a group of many small cell made of wax in which bees store their honey

[10] "That crumb of bread is too heavy for you, Ant," said the little girl. "Drop it, and come and play with me!"

"I don't care how heavy it is," said the Ant. "I was so glad to find it that I am willing to carry it. Oh, no, I couldn't stop to play. Once some one stepped upon our house and crushed it. We Ants thought we would go and hunt for a ready-made³ house, but we traveled a very long way, and we were not able to find a house ready made, and we were obliged⁴ to come home and build. Oh, we have no time to play," said the Ant, as he started on with his crumb of bread.

So the little girl sat down upon a stone, that she might think better, and she said to herself: "The creatures all have their tasks to do, but I don't believe the flowers work. Do you work, Pink Clover?" she asked of a little flower growing at her feet.

"Oh, yes, I am very busy," said the Pink Clover. "I gather the sunbeams every morning and keep them shut in my petals quite carefully all day long. I drink up all the moisture I can find with my roots, and I grow, and grow, to get ready for the seed time. The flowers must all work," said the Pink Clover.

Then the little girl decided to go home to her mother, and she said: "Mother, the Squirrels and the Bees and the Ants and the Flowers all work. I am the only idle one. I want some work to do."

[15] So her mother brought out a little apron which the child had begun to hem⁵ so long ago that she had forgotten all about it; and the little girl worked so faithfully⁶ and well that she was not idle any more, but very industrious.⁷

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3. ready right away
 4. **Oblige (verb):** to be forced to do something
 5. to fold back and sew down the edge of cloth
 6. **Faithful (adjective):** loyal and constant
 7. **Industrious (adjective):** hard-working

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: What is the lesson of the short story?
 - A. Playing is always more fun than work.
 - B. Hard work is necessary and important.
 - C. Animals tend to work harder than humans.
 - D. Hard work is often rewarded.

2. PART B: Which detail from the story best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "Oh, mother, I do not like to work. Please let me go to the woods and play just a little while before I do my tasks." (Paragraph 3)
 - B. "Red Squirrel, you don't have to work, do you? You may just play, and eat nuts from morning till night. Isn't that all?" (Paragraph 5)
 - C. "The creatures all have their tasks to do, but I don't believe the flowers work. Do you work, Pink Clover?" (Paragraph 12)
 - D. "Mother, the Squirrels and the Bees and the Ants and the Flowers all work. I am the only idle one. I want some work to do." (Paragraph 14)

3. Which of the following describes what the little girl first thinks about the animals?
 - A. She doesn't realize that they work.
 - B. She knows how hard they work.
 - C. She is jealous that their work is fun.
 - D. She believes that they are lazy.

4. How does talking to the animals and the flower affect the little girl?

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Before the little girl agrees to work, she only wants to play. Do you think work is more important than play? Why are both work and play important? Think about the adults in your life. How do they show that work and play are both important?
2. At the end of the story, the little girl realizes how important work is. What work or chores do you do at home? How do you feel about doing these things? Why are they important?
3. The animals in the story each give the little girl reasons for why they work. How does this relate to animals in nature? Do you think animals in nature have jobs to do? Do you agree with the animals in the story when they explain the importance of their jobs?