

One-Timers

By Peggy Scott

Ellie spoke aloud as she wrote, "Once upon a time. . ."

"Stop. Stop. STOP!"

Ellie groaned as she put her pencil down and looked at her little sister. Why did she have to be so dramatic?

"Calm down, Missy. Many stories begin with 'Once upon a time.' What's the big deal?"

"Fairy tales! That's the big deal," Missy exclaimed. "Fairy tales begin with 'Once upon a time' and end with 'and they lived happily ever after.' You don't even know if your story is going to have a happy ending."

Ellie was starting to wish she had not shared her concerns about her science assignment with her little sister. Mrs. McGuire, her science teacher, had challenged Ellie's sixth grade class by assigning them a creative writing project. Their story had to tell of an experiment or reveal a science concept. In frustration, Ellie had consulted her sister. Even though Missy was two years younger, and even though she was often dramatic, she usually had good ideas.

"Besides," Missy continued. "'Once upon a time' makes me think of One-timers. One-timers are the bad guys. Remember?"

"Of course, I remember," Ellie defended herself. "That's why my story is going to talk about the experiment we did last summer with the landfill."

Ellie thought back to last summer when she and Missy had borrowed their mother's plastic laundry pail and had created a mini landfill. In the bottom of the pail, they had placed samples of organic garbage, all in mini sizes: a small piece of orange peel, half a grape, a tiny rose petal, a pea, a blade of grass, and part of a leaf. They also placed some man-made items in the pail: a small piece of plastic bag, a piece of newspaper, a small nail, a marble, a rubber band, a broken crayon, and a Styrofoam packing peanut. Mom had suggested they write down all the things that they put in the landfill and tape the list to the pail. Then they had filled the pail with potting soil, covering all their garbage. They poured several cups of water over the soil to act as rain. Every two to three weeks they had taken turns raining on their landfill by using the garden watering can. The hardest part had been the waiting. They had decided to wait for six months before examining their landfill to see what had decayed and what had not changed at all. Six months later they had dumped their pail on a large piece of paper. Carefully they had sorted through the soil, looking for the items on their list.

Ellie's thoughts were interrupted as Missy chanted, "One-timer. One-timer. You'll never get to be an old-timer!"

"Oh puh-leeze, Missy. Good idea. Bad rhyme."

"Don't you get it, Ellie? You must stress in your story that people must try to use things that can be reused. Reduce. Reuse. Recycle. We have learned all about the three R's at school. Paper plates, paper cups, paper napkins, and paper towels are all One-timers. Washable plates, cups, napkins, and towels can be used and then washed and reused. Batteries can be recharged instead of being used one time and then thrown out. Think of all the newspapers and soda cans that can be recycled. They should never be One-timers."

As Missy paused to catch her breath, Ellie smiled. "Okay. Okay. You've convinced me, but I still don't know how to begin my story."

"Simple. 'A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away. . .'"

"But that's from Star Wars. I can't use their words. Besides, that's way in the future."

“Right! That’s the thing. We want our Earth to have a future. It is important to know what decays quickly in the landfill and what does not. Decide what things are One-timers and then try not to fill the landfill with them.” With a cartwheel and a bounce, Missy was out the door, battling imaginary figures of One-timers.

Ellie sighed as she picked up her pencil and began to write.

“In a land not so far away. . .”