



# The Farmyard Children

(what is new and what stays the same?)

Here is a story about returning to school and the different ways we might feel about it. Let's meet the characters first. They live in a farmyard, and all through the spring they have not been able to go anywhere because of the new rules about keeping safe and keeping apart.

During the story there are markers (\*) in places. These are to encourage ideas about pictures that could be drawn to accompany the story. As you read the paragraph, think about what you would put in your picture, to help tell the story.

Posy is a small white hedgehog. She doesn't go out in the sun much, because her pale skin can quickly get sore. She spends a lot of time sitting in the shade watching the world, or curled up a prickly ball asleep, or worrying that she will be 'got' by another animal (\*). She lives with her 2 older brothers, who are much braver and trundle around the neighbourhood having exciting adventures.

Jumpy is a lively green frog. He loves the sun and enjoys being in his pool watching the other creatures who come to the pond to drink. Jumpy wished he had a bigger pond so that he could swim up and down until he is tired out. He feels a little bit stuck in this small place, but when he leaves the water to bounce away some energy, he feels afraid that next doors cat, or the bouncy puppy may try to catch him (\*).

Star is a brightly coloured butterfly. She is always moving around and finds it hard to stay still for long. She likes to be in the air chasing other butterflies in swirling patterns, or visiting the beautiful flowers for tasty sugary snacks (\*).

Frazzle is a fluffy grey gosling. He has big stompy feet and is learning to hiss, to keep people away. Frazzle came from a large family where there was lots of squabbling about getting enough to eat, bickering about getting attention from the grown-ups. Frazzle can make things very messy (\*). The flower borders can quickly become mud baths, and the lawn can get nibbled to the bare earth. Frazzle can be very impatient, and peck or bash with his beak when he doesn't get his own way.

It is now time to start venturing out once more, and preparations have been made for the creatures to return to their school in the old barn at the end of the lane. It is a quiet, safe place with lovely bright windows that let in the sunlight, a big wooden door that can be safely shut, and lots of interesting things inside to help the creatures learn about their world.

When Posy was told about returning to school, she curled up into her spiky ball and lay very still (\*). 'I thought you would like to be going out again' her Mother pondered. Posy was unsure. She had stayed inside for so long to protect herself from the hot sun, that she had lost her courage. She felt shy and had spent a lot of time very still. Her muscles seemed tight and tense and she had very little energy.

When Jumpy heard the news, he bounced around for ages. He was excited to be seeing his friends again, he bumped into a plant pot, sending it rolling across the path spilling soil and seedlings everywhere! He felt terrified that he would be in trouble and leapt madly across the lawn towards the path (\*). He heard the door of the farmhouse open and his heart raced, he was sure that he would be chased. Instead the busy farmer brought out a basket of freshly washed socks and overalls and pegged them on the line(\*). He grumbled at the overturned flower pot and muttered about the cheeky hedgehogs who come out at night. 'Phew' thought Jumpy, 'I'm in the clear'.

Star had enjoyed the lazy spring days and felt a sense of gloom as she was told about returning to school. She so loved fluttering around from place to place, watching the world from high in the air. She was not happy about the idea of sitting at a desk for ages in a stuffy old barn (\*). She needed space to stretch out her wings, and what would she nibble on, there were no sugary snacks in the barn. Star wasn't sure why there had been no school this Spring and didn't understand about keeping safe from a virus that could make people ill. She just new that school meant keeping still, and having to wait until lunch time for something to eat.

Frazzle on the other hand was a bit scared about returning to school. Not that you would know it. Scared feelings turned into something else inside Frazzle. He became scary and loud (\*). He snapped the heads off the flowers with his beak, flapped his wings fiercely at anything that moved, and paddled very runny pooh all over the path.

In the barn were 2 busy creatures. Pip, the farmer's old collie dog, and Searcher the big brown owl (\*). Pip was carefully moving the furnishings to make the space safe, and to give everyone plenty of room to learn in peace, yet not feel alone. It was a tricky job, working out how to position the furniture and the equipment, so that everyone could get to what they needed without being too close. Pip felt a bit sad, the word 'close' had always been a good thing – a way of describing friendship, caring, and togetherness, but now it seemed to be a word that set alarm bells racing about danger and illness, and even death. Pip was wondering how to help the creatures cope with all of these changes when they returned next week.

Searcher was watching Pip and he noticed the worried look on Pip's face. Searcher was also thinking of the changes and what these would mean for each of the creatures. 'Tell me what is on your mind' he offered. Pip gave a big sigh, 'children should enjoy coming to school, it should not be a worry or a frustration for them, how do we get it right?'

Searcher sat silently for a while then responded with a shuffle. 'We need to help them notice the changes without feeling afraid and celebrate, with joy and gratitude, the things that have not changed'.

Searcher and Pip talked for a while about the changes, such as how to help the children remember to be further apart than usual, or how to encourage them to keep clean hands, and feet! (\*) They wondered if the children would ask questions like 'what is a virus?'. Searcher said he would describe it as the germs in the air that we can breathe in or out, and that can land on the things we touch. They wondered about how to explain the reasons for staying apart. Pip stated that he would encourage the children to be far enough apart to avoid being 'tigged' and close enough to be able to hear each other speak.

Pip smiled to himself and said 'imagine you are each a large wise elephant with enormous flapping ears. You wander around in a herd but not close enough for your ears to touch'. He imagined the children with large cardboard elephant headdresses, wandering around without bumping into each other (\*).

Searcher smiled too, 'elephants have long trunks too, so they must be far enough apart for their trunks not to touch'. He imagined the children shuffling further apart as they stood in a line waiting for their lunch.

Searcher said 'elephants love water, and are always bathing themselves, I'm not sure these children will like so much handwashing!' Pip responded 'but in hot countries where elephants live, the water is seen as sacred, a sign of love and nurture, we should teach the children that washing our own hands is a way of showing love for ourselves, as well as helping to keep others safe and loved too' (\*).

Pip hummed a little song to himself about the water being sacred, and about washing away our worries as we wash away the germs. He muttered about ways of counting our breath 'in for 5, out for 5, in for 5, out for 5'. 'If the children count their long breath twice as they wash, that will be long enough to wash away worries and germs'.

Searcher thought this would make a good poem. He scribbled it down on a sheet of bright yellow paper that he was cutting out to make shapes for a display board. Some pieces fell to the floor, leaving a yellow trail behind him.

'Breath in for 5 as you soap your hands and watch the bubbles grow,  
Breath out for 5 as you rinse them clean and the germs all swirl away,  
Breath in for 5 let the water tell your worries all to 'go'  
Breath out for 5, blow away your stress and carry on your day'.

Pip wondered about these new rules, as he collected up the pieces of yellow paper scrunching them up and throwing them one by one at the bin. 'I think the children will have a lot of new things to think about. Let's not forget the things that will be lovely about coming back to school'. Pip imagined seeing lots of smiling faces as the children saw old friends, and the cheerful sound when all their voices sang together. Pip remembered the quiz games they played about the new topics they learned, and the tasty lunches they ate together (\*).

Searcher nodded, 'I love watching the children listening to stories, where their bodies can relax, their minds can be still, and their imaginations can create the pictures of the characters in their heads (\*). I think this will be a good way to feel calm and relaxed – so that courage can return. I can think of a small hedgehog who may need some help to feel brave again'.

Pip thought of other activities that would help the children. 'I recall how much the children enjoyed the obstacle course last year. We made challenges for them like a box to crawl through or a gate to climb over or a bean bag to get in the hoop (\*). I can think of a frog who is very bouncy and I think this will be a good way of releasing some energy inside their bodies after so long away from school. We could ask each of the children to invent a part of the course, using the equipment we have. We could start and end the course with a soapy hand wash, and find as many things for them to do with their feet, so they don't have to use their hands'.



Searcher thought of the challenge of sitting still after so long away from school. 'I think we should have lots of time for nature and noticing our surroundings. Nature likes us to move slowly and quietly, a little way apart, perhaps nature walks around the farm will help the children with wiggles and fidgets (\*). I can think of a butterfly who is always flitting around'. Pip frowned a little; 'that butterfly always seems to want sugary snacks too, so I'm guessing we will have to have some good rules about taking care of our bodies with healthy treats, and learning to be patient again'.

Pip could feel himself getting excited at the thought of lots of new obstacles or challenges. He couldn't wait for the children to return. 'Using up lots of energy is a good way of helping children with their anger and worries too, I can think of a gosling who sometimes feels like a snappy crocodile', Searcher nodded again, 'Let's not forget that these angry feelings hide our fears and worries, so we need a place for their worries to be safely kept'. He glanced around, noticing the bin. Some of the yellow scrunched up paper had fallen around it. It reminded him of waterlily flowers, and gave him an idea.

'I think we should have a worry pond' he said. 'A what?' Pip responded, sounding surprised. 'Searcher stared into the distance, daydreaming about his idea. 'When the children have a worry, they could write or draw it on this thick yellow paper and scrunch it into round shapes. We could take them out into the farmyard and throw them into the pond and watch the breeze blow them away (\*). Then we could ask a certain fluffy bird who loves to paddle, to collect them up and place them all to dry in a basket on the grass. It would be a great way of keeping his muddy feet clean too!'

'When the children have all gone home', Searcher continued, 'we could read their worries and fears and decide how best to help them'. 'I like that idea' said Pip, 'leaving worries at school, in a safe place, instead of taking them home'.

'We just have one more task' Searcher reminded him. 'We have a bag for each of the children to put their new school things in, and we must label each bag with their names, so that everyone can start with new pencils, paper, rubbers and rulers, without sharing germs during the day' (\*).

'It's a bit like a party bag' Pip noticed. 'Yes' Searcher replied, 'coming back to school should be a celebration of our friendships, our trust in each other, and our chance to play and learn in a safe place'.

Very Best Wishes  
Di Hoyer