

First Day Folly

By ReadWorks

During the week before school started this year, I suddenly got really nervous. It took me a couple of days to figure out that the butterflies in my stomach were due to anxiety about school. I've always been very good at academics, so I just didn't think I could possibly be afraid of the start of another year, but this year I was beginning middle school—7th grade—and all I felt was dread.

Of course Mom tried to help me feel better about it. She and I went grocery shopping for school snacks and then shopping for school clothes. She even treated me to a new backpack. "You're going to need a stronger bag to carry all those heavy textbooks," she said.

Usually, when Mom and I go on little outings, we have a really nice time, and I forget about being worried or angry. But this time... I just couldn't shake my shakiness.

"Honey," Mom stopped me from modeling a bright yellow button-down dress at the store. "You have to relax. It's going to be fine. Middle school isn't easy, but it's not the end of the world."

"Thanks, Mom. That's not very reassuring," I said. "Aren't you supposed to tell me that I'm going to be great and that it's all a piece of cake?"

"No, I'm supposed to tell you the truth," she said. "And that includes you being great. But being a pre-teen isn't a piece of cake."

I sighed. She was definitely right.

Later that night, we talked about what I might be fretting about. It was Thursday night. I had three days until I had to walk through the middle school doors, no longer just a kid.

"I think the work is going to be harder," I began. "And the people are going to be mean. And I haven't met many of the teachers. The building is different. How could I have forgotten that I'm in 7th grade now?"

"Because you were having so much fun on our camping trip?" Mom joked.

"Har har. And yeah, that was fun. I guess I just had such a good time this summer that I forgot to prepare for this year," I said.

Mom took time to listen to me and reassure me that I wouldn't come up against anything that I couldn't handle. As for the people, she said, well... I couldn't change how anyone was going to act, but I could act friendly to everyone else. I went to bed feeling a little bit better.

During my last weekend of freedom, Mom and I took some day trips: Friday the aquarium, and Saturday a berry farm for blueberry picking. Saturday afternoon, we bought pie from a local farm stand and ate half of it together before we even got home. I was feeling better about the whole school thing when Mom got a call that evening—it was her work.

“Anne, I won’t be able to take you to school on Monday,” she said, hanging up the phone.

“What? Why not? I need you to be there for me!”

“I got called in to cover a shift that morning. I’m sorry. You’ll have to take the bus... But I’ll be able to pick you up in the afternoon,” she promised.

I huffed upstairs. She came up to say sorry and good night later on, but Mom knows well enough to leave me alone when I’m having a tantrum. I went to sleep with those pesky butterflies eating at my stomach.

The next morning, I woke up staring at my bed-side clock. 7:54, it read, and I panicked. *Oh my, I am going to be late for my first day.* I yanked on one of my new outfits, grabbed my backpack from the closet, and jumped down the stairs, two by two.

Mom wasn’t in the kitchen. *She didn’t even say good-bye!* I thought. I knew she had to work, but she could have at least wished me luck on my first day. There was no food waiting for me on the counter, either, so I shoved a bag of frozen bagels into my bag, hoping they’d defrost by the time I got to school.

When I got outside, I didn’t see the bus at the corner. *Oh no. I’ve missed the bus. It’s my first day of middle school, and I’ve missed the bus.* What a nightmare. How could this have happened? I wanted to cry, but I was too stressed out to sit down and sob. I knew where the school was, and even though it was two miles away, I broke out into a run.

I passed a few mothers playing with their kids on sidewalks as I tore around the corner to the next block. I passed the little neighborhood park a few streets from my house and saw more kids, shouting as they hung from the monkey bars. I kept running, but it was weird: *Why aren’t these kids on their way to school?* Then I heard my name.

“Anne! Anne! What are you doing?”

It was my mom. I stopped running.

“What? Mom! Aren’t you supposed to be at work?” She was wearing black tights and running shoes, and jogged over from across the street.

“Honey, what on earth? I was just out for a run.” She looked me over for a moment and smiled. “It’s Sunday, Anne.”

“I am an idiot,” I said. I sat down on the sidewalk, sweaty and out of breath. “I was so nervous about school starting that I woke up and thought it was Monday. I thought you had left for work without even saying good-bye.”

“Just because I can’t take you to school tomorrow doesn’t mean I won’t still wake you up and hug you good-bye!” Mom said, hugging me. “Let’s go home... Is that an entire bag of frozen bagels in your backpack?”

I smiled. The next day, Mom did in fact wake me up to say good-bye and good luck, and I caught the bus just fine. Day one of school was easy, and while I knew every day wouldn’t be, at least I’d never have to survive my accidental first day again.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is Anne nervous about?

2. What are the two main parts of this story?

3. What are two clues Anne came across as she was running to school that could have helped her realize it was not a school day?

4. Anne saw a few things as she was running to school that would have indicated it was not a school day. Why didn't she realize it was NOT a school day?

5. What is the main idea of this story?

6. Read the sentences and answer the question.

"During the week before school started this year, I suddenly got really nervous. It took me a couple of days to figure out that the butterflies in my stomach were due to anxiety about school."

What does the word "anxiety" mean in this text?

7. What word or phrase best completes the sentence?

Anne's mom tries to reassure her as much as possible, _____ Anne is still very nervous for the first day of school.

8. What was Anne’s actual first day of school like?

9. How does Anne feel during her accidental first day as she gets ready and runs to school? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

10. How might Anne’s accidental first day have helped her get through her actual first day of school? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
