



“The Contented Boy”  
Lesson 2: Compare and Contrast Short Stories  
Vintage Classroom

The theme for this lesson is ‘duty before pleasure.’ In 1895 children attending a one-room schoolhouse would have had chores before and after school. They might have to clean the barn, collect eggs, milk cows, cook, or look after younger children. Like all villages on Mount Desert Island, families living and working in the village of Sound would have worked hard as fishermen, quarrymen (cutting and moving large stones for roads, house foundations, and landscaping), farmers, and caretakers.

Children would have made toys and games from things they could find or make, like hoops from barrels or wagon wheels, and toys made from carved wood or dolls from leftover fabric scraps. Stores sold fabric, food, and hardware, but furniture and household items might have to be ordered from a catalog. Families did not have as many possessions as we do today.

Families would have made most of their food from scratch including bread and butter, so cooking was a time consuming task. Because there were so many chores that needed to be done before and after work or school, families relied on children to share the workload. Lessons like ‘duty before pleasure’ would have been taught in school to reinforce the importance of children working instead of playing.

Directions: Below are two short stories, “The Contented Boy,” which was written over 125 years ago, and “My New Scooter,” which was written very recently. Read both stories and answer the following questions.

- 1) Describe what life is like for the boy in “The Contented Boy.” How is it different than life for the girl in “My New Scooter?” Is your life more like the boy or the girl?
- 2) The boy describes several duties he must take care of each day. List three of them. How much does he earn for this work?
- 3) What did the girl do to earn her new scooter? What duties does she have?
- 4) What do you think “The Contented Boy” was supposed to teach children at a one-room school house? Is there a lesson to learn from “My New Scooter?”
- 5) What duties do you have at home, and how do they help your family?

## The Contented Boy

Mr. Lenox was one morning riding by himself. He got off from his horse to look at something on the roadside. The horse broke away from him and ran off. Mr. Lenox ran after him, but soon found that he could not catch him.

A little boy at work in a field near the road, heard the horse. As soon as he saw him running from his master, the boy ran very quickly to the middle of the road, and, catching the horse by the bridle, stopped him till Mr. Lenox came up.

*Mr. Lenox.* Thank you, my good boy, you have caught my horse very nicely. What shall I give you for your trouble?

*Boy.* I want nothing, sir

*Mr. L.* You want nothing? So much the better for you. Few men can say as much. But what were you doing in the field?

*B.* I was rooting up weeds, and tending the sheep that were feeding on turnips.

*Mr. L.* Do you like to work?

*B.* Yes, sir, very well, this is fine weather.

*Mr. L.* But would you not rather play?

*B.* This is not hard work. It is almost as good as play.

*Mr. L.* Who set you to work?

*B.* My father, sir.

*Mr. L.* What is your name?

*B.* Peter Hurdle, sir.

*Mr. L.* How old are you?

*B.* Eight years old, next June.

*Mr. L.* How long have you been here?

*B.* Ever since six o'clock this morning.

*Mr. L.* Are you not hungry?

*B.* Yes, sir, but I shall go to dinner soon.

*Mr. L.* If you had a dime now, what would you do with it?

*B.* I don't know, sir. I never had so much.

*Mr. L.* Have you no playthings?

*B.* Playthings? What are they?

*Mr. L.* Such things as ninepins, marbles, tops, and wooden horses.

*B.* No, sir. Tom and I play at football in winter, and I have a jumping rope. I had a hoop, but it is broken.

*Mr. L.* Do you want nothing else?

*B.* I have hardly time to play with what I have. I have to drive the cows, and to run on errands, and to ride the horses to the fields, and that is as good as play.

*Mr. L.* You could get apples and cakes, if you had money, you know.

*B.* I can have apples at home. As for cake, I do not want that. My mother makes me a pie now and then, which is as good.

*Mr. L.* Would you not like a knife to cut sticks?

*B.* I have one. Here it is. Brother Tom gave it to me.

*Mr. L.* Your shoes are full of holes. Don't you want a new pair?

*B.* I have a better pair for Sundays.

*Mr. L.* But these let in water.

*B.* I do not mind that, sir.

*Mr. L.* Your hat is all torn, too.

*B.* I have a better one at home.

*Mr. L.* What do you do when it rains?

*B.* If it rains very hard when I am in the field, I get under a tree for shelter.

*Mr. L.* What do you do, if you are hungry before it is time to go home?

*B.* I sometimes eat a raw turnip.

*Mr. L.* But if there is none?

*B.* Then I do as well as I can without. I work on, and never think of it.

*Mr. L.* Why, my little fellow, I am glad to see that you are so contented. Were you ever at school?

*B.* No, sir. But father means to send me next winter.

*Mr. L.* You will want books then.

*B.* Yes, sir; each boy has a Spelling Book, and a Reader, and a Testament.

*Mr. L.* Then I will give them to you. Tell your father so, and that it is because you are an obliging, contented little boy.

*B.* I will, sir. Thank you.

*Mr. L.* Good by, Peter.

B. Good morning, sir.

*Dr. John Aiken*

DEFINITIONS. - Rooting, *pulling up by the roots*. Tending, *working, attending*. Turnip, *a vegetable*. Weather, *state of the atmosphere*. Errands, *messages*. Raw, *not cooked*. Testament, *the last twenty-seven books of the Bible*.

### My New Scooter

It was amazing. I couldn't keep my eyes off it. The way it shone in the light kept drawing my eye back to it. My dad noticed. "Sophie, you have a scooter already, a really nice one!" "I know, but look at this one! It's so shiny and new," I said. "It is great, but we have to get going. Come on," said Dad. We left the store, with me taking one last glance back at the new scooter. I knew my scooter was nice, and it still worked even though I'd gotten it for my birthday 3 years ago. I just couldn't stop thinking of that new scooter!

A few weeks later, Dad and I were back in the store. The scooter wasn't on display where it was before, but as we passed the toy section, I kept my eyes open for it. There it was, with a big sale sign on it! I couldn't help myself, I ran right over to it. Dad looked at the price. "I know you've been thinking about this scooter a lot, Sophie, and you haven't asked for much from me or mom lately. You've been helpful around the house, too. The sale price is pretty good, though it's still a lot of money. I can't just buy this for you, but what if I pay for part of it, then lend you the money for the rest of the scooter, and you promise to pay me back?" Dad asked. "Would you really?" I said excitedly. "I promise I will pay you back, I will!" "Sure, let's get it," said Dad as he picked up the box. As we were walking toward the registers, Dad asked me if I knew what it meant to borrow money.

"Yes, it means that I have to give it back to you," I answered. Dad responded, "You're right, but you can give it back to me a little at a time. Right now you get five dollars a week for your allowance. Instead of using it for a little treat, you could pay it back to me until you pay off your part of the scooter. It will take a couple of months for you to be done paying me back for it if you do that. Does that work for you?" "Sure, Dad! Thank you so much, I can't wait to use my new scooter! I will pay you back with my allowance until I return all the money I'm borrowing from you today. You're the best!"