

What Can I Do?-An Earth Day Story

by Kim Moon

The little boy walked dejectedly down the cracked sidewalk. His backpack was heavy and his feet were slow. He stayed to his path, pausing every now and then only to pick out a new can or wad of paper to kick as he went along his way. His heart felt as heavy as his backpack as he opened the door to his house and went inside.

His mother was in the kitchen, taking brownies out of the oven. She smiled as she turned around but stopped when she saw his face. "Tyler, what happened? Is everything okay?" "Nothing is okay, mom. Nothing will ever be okay again." He stood in the middle of the kitchen as his mother came over to the kitchen table. "Sounds like you had a rough day, Tyler. Is there anything I can do to help?" "That's just the thing, Mom. We can't help. There's nothing we can do." He sat down at the table and put his head in his hands. His mother sat down and waited a moment until Tyler began to speak again.

"Today, in science, the teacher was talking about Earth Day and the environment. Earth Day is supposed to be a day when every person promises to do something to help take care of our world. Mrs. Green was telling us how many companies are not careful about how they get rid of their industrial waste. She said that our world is getting dirtier and that many animals and plants are dying. She wants us to think of something we can do to help and I thought all the way home and there is nothing I can do. I can't stop the companies from polluting our air and water and I can't save all of the animals! There is not anything that I can do to make a difference."

His mother sat for a minute, thinking. "You sound like this really concerns you and that you have put a lot of thought into it, Tyler." Tyler nodded. "Let me tell you a story that your grandfather told me. I don't know where he heard it, but I think that it might help you think about your problem in a different way." She began, "one morning a man was walking down a beach that was covered in dying starfish. The tide the night before had been especially strong and thousands of starfish had been washed up on shore, too far up for them to make it back into the water by themselves. The man shook his head as he trudged along thinking what a shame it was that all of those starfish would die on the beach. He came upon a boy who was throwing starfish back into the ocean as fast as he could. He was out of breath and it was obvious that he had been at this task for a while. "Son," the man said, "you might as well quit. There are thousands of them. They are washed up all over the beach as far as you can see. There is no way you can make any sort of a difference." The boy did not even pause in what he was doing. He kept bending and throwing but as he did, he spoke to the man, "I can make a difference to this one, and this one, and this one." And the man thought, and he knew the boy was right. He began to help return the animals to their home, smiling at how life's biggest lessons sometimes came from the smallest people."

Tyler stared intently at his mother. "But he did make a difference, didn't he? To every starfish that he threw back in?" His mother nodded, smiling. He sat for a moment, thinking about what his mother had said. "So, what it means is that even though I can't change everything, I can make a big difference by doing the little things that matter?" "That," she said, sliding him the plate of brownies, "is exactly what I am saying." Tyler grinned and took a brownie from the plate. "That gives me an idea." His mother smiled even bigger and said, "I kind of thought that it might." The next morning on the way to school, his feet hardly touched the ground. He told his teacher the story of the starfish and his idea. Mrs. Green thought it was a great idea, and decided to let Tyler share the story and his idea with the class. Everyone got to work immediately, cutting out the large green leaves.

On Earth Day, there was an assembly and everyone in the community was invited. Many of those gathered were startled to see the large brown tree trunk affixed to the auditorium wall. They sat, puzzled, and waited for the program to begin. A boy, dressed up to look like a man, walked across a stage filled with starfish. The play went on as Tyler and his class told the story taking place. When it was over the audience applauded as Tyler stood at the podium.

"We were all thinking, and it was frustrating because we didn't think that we could do anything. The problems seemed too big for us to do anything about them. But we decided that together, even the little things we do could add up to mean a lot to our world." The kids began passing out the green leaves and pens to the audience. "We want every person to think of one thing they can do that could make a difference to our world. Even if it seems like something small, it will matter."

The audience began writing, and soon the tree was covered with the green leaves. Tyler and his class read many of them as they attached them to the tree. "I will walk to work." "I will use both sides of my paper to save trees." "I will have my pet neutered so there won't be any puppies born that won't have a home." "I will plant a tree every year." "I will start recycling my newspapers." Tyler thought, and bent to write his promise on the leaf. Soon, the tree was beautiful and green and covered with the Earth Day promises. People were laughing and talking as they left, thinking of what they had promised to do.

When the dismissal bell rang, Tyler got his backpack and began the short walk home. As he reached the sidewalk, he pulled an old grocery bag from his backpack. He began picking up the trash as he made his way home, instead of kicking it. He smiled all the way, thinking of the difference they would make.

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

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Reading Comprehension Questions by Linda Owens

DIRECTIONS: Read the questions based on the story you just read and circle the correct answer.

1. **What were Tyler and his classmates learning about in school?**
 - a. division
 - b. American History
 - c. adjectives
 - d. protecting our environment
2. **Why was Tyler upset when he went home from school?**
 - a. He didn't know how to do long division.
 - b. He didn't think he could help our environment.
 - c. He wanted to go camping at the lake.
 - d. He was mad with his friends.
3. **What did Tyler's Mom do to help him understand how he could help take care of our world?**
 - a. She baked a birthday cake for him.
 - b. She wrote him a letter.
 - c. She told him a story about a boy on the beach.
 - d. She took him to the movies.
4. **What did Tyler and his classmates do to share the story about the boy and the starfish?**
 - a. They told the story at the Earth Day Assembly Program.
 - b. They took a field trip to the beach.
 - c. They baked brownies in class.
 - d. They invited a clown to juggle the Earth at the program.
5. **What did Tyler's class ask the audience to do?**
 - a. work division problems
 - b. write one thing each of them could do to help our world
 - c. clean up their houses
 - d. none of these
6. **What is the main idea of this story?**
 - a. We can all learn to work math problems.
 - b. We can all learn to speak Japanese.
 - c. We can all do something to help protect our environment
 - d. We can all cut out green leaves.