

A Child's Day on the Ranch



Directions:

Read the story and compare and contrast your day to that of a child on the ranch. Try the activities in *Think More About It* with your family.

Morning at the Ranch

“Goodness, John, wake up! It is five o’clock already!” Mother called upstairs. John opened his eyes and looked out the small window of his bedroom. He could see that the sun was not up yet and the sky was still dark. John stretched quickly and jumped right out of bed. There were morning chores waiting to be done.

John quickly dressed in his cotton shirt and comfortable trousers. He then hurried down stairs and outside to the barn to join his father.

Together Father and John milked the cows, cleaned the pens, and fed the livestock. After giving his pet calf a quick pat, John returned to the house for breakfast.

A Hearty Breakfast

In the kitchen Mother and John’s sister, Emily moved quickly around the kitchen fireplace preparing breakfast. Soon Father and John came in, and the family sat down to a hearty breakfast. Mother and Emily had cooked sizzling bacon, fried potatoes, hot pancakes with maple syrup, and fresh bread with preserves.

Think More About It: Making Bread and Butter

Emily and Mother would have made from scratch many of the items that were served on the family table. One of these items would have been bread and butter. Today we have bread makers that allow us to simplify the process of making bread from scratch. You can also make butter at home too. Follow the simple recipe below:

Ingredients:

1. Heavy Cream
2. A pinch of salt (if desired)

Supplies:

1. A Jar with a lid
2. Sink with faucet

Directions:

1. Fill a jar halfway with heavy cream (baby food jars work great for small batches), and screw the lid on tight.
2. Shake the jar up and down until the cream thickens and begins to stick together.

3. Then, open the jar, and pour any remaining liquid into another container; this is butter milk. Everything else left in the jar is butter.
4. Knead the butter under cold running water for several minutes to work out any remaining butter milk. (If this step is skipped the butter will spoil quickly.)
5. Knead in salt if desired.
6. Spread butter on bread and enjoy!

Time for School

John and Emily took their lunch boxes that their mother prepared for them and walked the half-hour trek to school. In school, John and Emily were expected to learn reading, ciphering (math), writing, and to “make their manners,” which meant that they were to bow or curtsy to their teacher waiting by the front door before entering class. School took place in a one room school house where children of all ages were instructed in the same room by one teacher. The rows of desks were organized by age with younger students sitting in the front rows and older students sitting to the back. Since John was nine he sat near the front, but his sister Emily was fourteen and sat in one of the middle rows.

John and Emily knew that children in school were expected to be well mannered and respectful, if not, they could be disciplined by the teacher. John remembered an event that occurred one winter day.



School Story: Mischief Makers

One winter morning John was reading his primer, book that allowed him to practice his reading, when he heard some older boys behind him whispering and laughing. He tried to ignore them as she struggled to memorize the poems and verses in his book. John really wanted to practice writing the letters of the alphabet in his copy book, but he had to wait. The ink, which he had left in his desk overnight, had frozen after the fire in the stove was put out the night before. Almost all of the students had this problem, so there was a row of ink bottles thawing along the top of the stove.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Huge booms filled the quiet classroom. Many of the children screamed in terror at the loud noise, except the older boys sitting behind John. They were all laughing loudly! John saw that the ceiling was splattered with large black spots. The teacher had noticed too. As the teacher glanced at the laughing boys, his face grew very serious. One by one the teacher called the mischief makers outside. When the boys came back in they were no longer laughing. The teacher had whipped them for intentionally leaving the corks in their thawing ink bottles, causing them to explode. The pranksters did not play tricks for quite a while after that!

Think More About It: School

What kinds of discipline do you have now in school? What similarities and differences do you see between schools long ago compared to school today?

Stories with Messages

Both John and Emily loved to read. The books they read at home and in school were very different than the storybooks that children read today. Their books were packed with messages, or morals, about how people should behave. Morality tales were supposed to teach children kindness, good manners, and respect for others. There were no police in earlier times, so people had to trust one another. Children were raised to be good and honest. In morality stories, good things happened to “good” children. Children who were considered “bad” always met with disaster.

The story below was taken from a school reader that may have been used by John and Emily. The story tells the story of a boy whose dog has better manners than he did. How would you rewrite this story?

A Moral Story: The Boy and His Dog

A favorite dog, named Mungo, stood by his mistress one morning as she prepared her children, Eliza and Edmund, for school.

Eliza had been busy assisting Edmund, who now stood waiting while his mother prepared his sister as quickly as possible. As it was getting late, Mother asked Edmund to fetch the lunch basket. The bad-mannered boy, however, only gave a sour look. Though he did not refuse, he did not hurry to obey his mother’s order.

“Well, my son,” Mother said, “if you are unwilling to do anything for others, how can you expect others to help you? Our Mungo would bring me the basket in a moment, if he knew how.”

As the mother said this, which she meant only as a scolding for her son, she was surprised to see the dog go to the closet, take the basket down from behind the door, and bring it to her side.

Let those children who are unwilling to help others, blush and be ashamed at the example of this noble dog.

Think More About It: Moral Stories

What stories have you read that have morals to them?

What was the moral to the story?

Challenge yourself and write your own story with a moral.

Think of a moral that you have learned and then create a story about how another child might learn it.

Evening Chores

After school, John and Emily would walk home where more chores waited for them. John enjoyed helping his father with the animals. He would spread fresh hay in the stalls for the cows, calves, pigs, and goats so the animals could have soft clean beds. He fed the animals and milked the cows and goats. Each night John had an important job, he was to bring the cows in from the pasture to ensure the cows were safe from the wild animals. If the valuable cows were left out over night they could be killed.

Story: John Forgets His Job

One Saturday, John and Emily went out to pick wild strawberries. They could eat as many berries as they wished while they were picking, as long as they made sure to bring back Mother enough to make a berry pie. John and Emily had a contest to see who could pick the most. They were so carried away in their competition that they lost track of the time. It seemed as if they had just eaten lunch when they heard Mother calling the family to supper.

Before bedtime that night, Father asked John if the cows had eaten a lot of grass in the pasture. Suddenly, John remembered that he had forgotten his chore of putting the herd of cattle back in the barn! John raced from the house to the faraway fields, listening to the wolves howling in the distance. John worried that he would be too late!

Luckily, the cows were safe. John was not as lucky, however. He had neglected his job. He knew he deserved the punishment Father would give him, but he did not look forward to it! What do you think John's punishment was?

Chores for Emily

While John was out helping Father, Emily was expected to help her mother in the house. There was dinner to cook, oil lamps needed to be cleaned and filled, hauling water from the pump for washing, or other house hold chores depending on what day of the week it was: Mothers and their daughters followed a strict schedule to accomplish all the work that needed to be done on a rural farm or ranch, Monday was wash day called blue Monday because the "bluing" used on white clothes dyed your hands blue. Tuesday was ironing day and everything, including the sheets were ironed. Wednesday was mending day and nothing was put away until all the tears were patched and all missing buttons were replaced. Thursday was garden day for weeding and hoeing. Friday was the big house cleaning day to get ready for the weekend. Saturdays were for baking bread for the week, making butter and preparing food for Sundays. On Sundays, most families attended church to socialize.

Think More About It: Chores

How have chores stayed the same and how have they changed?

Think about the chores that you do in your house. Are they divided into morning and evening chores? If they are not could they be?

Time for Dinner

It is finally dinner time! The kitchen is warm and smells good. John's and Emily's stomachs growl as father says a prayer of thanks and serves dinner. Emily and John receive their servings last because adults were always served first.

Finally, Father placed a heaping plate of food in front of each child. The plates were piled high with smoked ham, Johnny cake, and pickled beets. John's face lit up when he saw that Mother had prepared his favorite dish—fried apples 'n' onions! Emily was not happy to see the apples 'n' onions, which she did not like at all. She did not complain, however. She was supposed to eat everything on her plate without complaining.

The children ate as quickly as possible as they listened to their parents talk. Emily and John were not allowed to speak unless spoken to, but that did not matter because all of their hard work had made them too hungry to talk!

Think More About It: Old Fashion Treats

You can use the recipes on this page to make some of the foods that Emily and John ate.

Fried apples 'n' onions

Believe it or not, apples and onions have an unusual and delicious flavor when cooked together!

8-10 slices of bacon
6 yellow onions
6 tart apples
2 tablespoons brown sugar

Fry the bacon slices in a skillet. While the bacon is cooking, peel and slice the onions. Remove the cores from the apples. Slice the apples into thin rings. Leave the skins on! They help the apples keep their shape, and the bright red adds color to the meal. When the bacon is completely cooked, remove it from the skillet and set it aside on a plate.

Drain most of the bacon fat from the skillet. Add the onion slices and cook them over medium-high heat for about three minutes. Spread the apple slices over the onions. Sprinkle brown sugar on top, cover the skillet, and cook for a few more minutes until the apples are tender. Stir only if it looks as if the onions are going to burn. Add the apples 'n' onions to the bacon. This dish serves six people.

Potato cakes

Potato cakes are easy and fun to make. The early settlers liked them because they tasted good and used up leftover potatoes.

Divide day-old cold mashed potatoes into the number of servings you wish to make. Shape the potatoes into patties. Make sure the cakes are not too thick, or they will not cook in the middle. Heat oil or bacon fat in a frying pan. Place the potato cakes in the hot fat, turning them over when the first side is brown and slightly crispy. When both sides are cooked, serve your tasty, crusty potato cakes.

A Happy Evening by the Fire

After dinner, Mother and Emily washed the dishes and cleaned the kitchen. Father sat by the fireplace and whittled a new handle for his axe. John played with some building blocks his father had made him.

Evenings were a happy time when the family sat together around the fire and ate apples, beechnuts, and popcorn. The children would quietly play or work on crafts. At sundown, everyone went to bed. They needed plenty of rest for the next busy day.

Think More About It: An Evening with Family

Think about the way your family spends their evening. How does it compare to the evening described in John and Emily's family?

Challenge your family to spend an evening similar to Emily and John's family. Turn off the television, turn off the computers and spend time doing quiet activities with your family.

Life was Busy, but Fun!

Children had lives that were very different from those of boys and girls today. Difficult work was a part of everyday life. In order to have enough food and clothing, the entire family had to work hard. Boys and girls began to do chores as soon as they were able to walk and talk. Parents loved their children, but they were very strict because they had to be - a family needed cooperation and team work to get everything done and survive.

Even though boys and girls worked hard, they always found time for fun. Many children today have a variety of toys, games and activities from which to choose from. Children in the past had to amuse themselves with simple games and a few homemade toys. Most of these games were played outdoors, using objects found around the ranch or in the community. An old barrel hoop provided hours of fun when it was rolled with a stick. With a bit of pretending, everyday items became items for play. A fence could become a bucking horse to ride or a board over a tree stomp became a simple seesaw. A child's only limit was their imagination.

Because most children did not have many toys, they took very good care of the ones they had. Common toys for boys were tin soldiers, yo-yos, tinker toys, and Lincoln logs. Dolls, dollhouses, and jacks, were toys just for girls. Both boys and girls loved to play with puppets, teddy bears, marbles, spinning tops, blocks, and crayons.