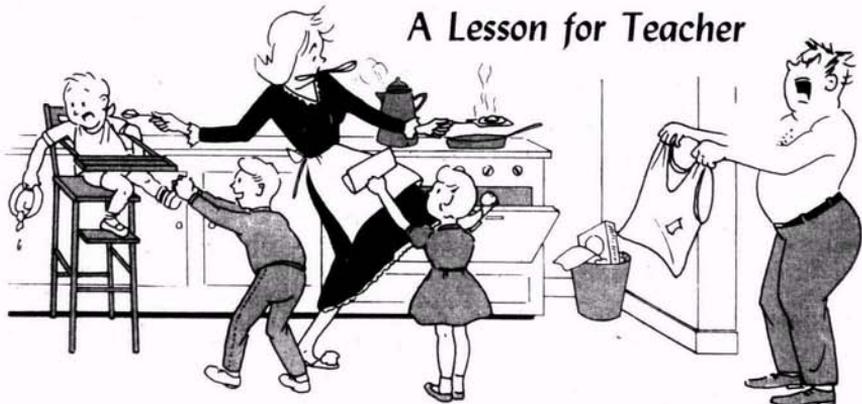


## A Lesson for Teacher



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*DEAR Mrs. Jones: As Larry's first grade teacher, I have been concerned that although he is a nice little boy and cooperative, he seems quite disorganized, particularly when he first arrives in the classroom. It takes Larry about an hour to become oriented, and he always looks a little disheveled and hurried. If you would kindly try to send him off in an unharried way after a leisurely breakfast, I feel Larry could do very much better in school.*

*Sincerely yours, Larry's Teacher.*

Dear Teacher: I have read your note carefully, and I realize what you say may be right at that. I'm not sure whether you're young and just out of school, newly married, or older with or without a grown family. Even if you were a man, it would be the same. But I have a little lesson to teach you, dear Teacher, which you can't find in any of your fancy textbooks.

I am in the kitchen getting breakfast, and Baby sits in his chair. He bangs his tray with his spoon, hollering and yelling baby talk, telling me to hurry with his cereal. Everyone else is upstairs dressing. Above Baby's clamoring, I hear Daddy's voice. "Where are my clean undershirts?" Now I know very well one clean shirt lies carefully folded in his drawer, so I ignore him. "Where are my undershirts?" he bellows again, this time from the kitchen door.

I tell him about the clean one. He holds it up—neckband well parted from shirt back. Well, I have two choices—stop everything and mend it, or tell him to go to work without an undershirt. The latter appeals more, but I don't dare chance it. So I grab my needle, and stir the cereal with the spoon in my mouth.

Larry, your little pupil, walks quietly into the kitchen. "I lost my nickel."

"But you had it laid out with your clothes last night."

"I had it in my hand, honest."

"Where is it then?"

"Down the toilet. It was real funny the way it flushed around and around," (this with gestures) "and then went d-o-w-n the drain."

"Yeah," I repeat, "real funny." The shirt is mended and the cereal done. I can't find a nickel, so I tell Larry to ask Daddy.

The five year old slinks into the kitchen, and I know to look at him something is wrong. Daddy is hollering at my ten year old daughter to hurry up, and Nancy, the three year old, is crying upstairs about something which I haven't time to investigate. I hope she isn't bleeding. "What's the matter with you?" I ask the five year old. He has lost his permission slip. Suddenly he is wailing at the top of his lungs. "Now I can't go on the field trip. Teacher says no one can go without a slip, and I can't find my slip." I quiet him and send the ten year old, who has finally appeared, to look for the permission slip.

The Baby pours his orange juice into his cereal and slops it around with his fingers on the tray and his clothes, and a little in his hair. I smell something burning. My automatic frypan is on the fritz; it sticks and burns the bacon. The telephone rings. My ten year old answers eventually, after six or seven rings. "It's for you, Mother." She sounds disappointed. They are having an emergency at the Church Rummage Sale and need an extra hand. Can I get a sitter and be there by ten? I say I'll try and run to turn the eggs. Daddy likes his two minutes, then over and left exactly to the count of three. I count and pretend I don't hear everyone asking for whatever I have none of in the cupboard.

Daddy is now yelling at all five children to be quiet so he can hear the news. Suddenly the three year old is wailing. I promised her a fried egg like Daddy's. She's right—I promised; but I forgot. She pushes her boiled egg away and continues to wail unconsolated. The ten year old stands in the doorway. "If Larry isn't ready this minute I won't wait for him. I have to meet my friends, and I won't wait for any baby."

I'm not really sure what Larry has eaten. I look at him hastily to be sure he has on the essentials like shoes and slacks. Larry rushes for his jacket, stuffing toast in his mouth, and tries to get his father's attention for the nickel. But Daddy is concentrating on some important item on the news broadcast (which he seems to hear somehow) and he has a wonderful way of not knowing the children are there. Finally I pry the nickel from him.

Maybe you've read in books, dear Teacher, about how a mother should plan for morning. Lay out the children's clothes the night before and you still end up with two socks that don't match, or it's too cold for the sweaters you laid out and you have to rummage for jackets. Take orders for breakfast, and when they see sister's scrambled eggs, they holler for that. Set the table at night, and your long lost Aunt Mathilda comes to call and wonders about your sloppy house-keeping. Collect all money and slips for school, and someone has a hole in his pocket. Get up earlier, did you say? Dear Teacher, when you're as tired as I am every little second counts.

If you have any further suggestions about my Larry, please be sure to let me know.

Very sincerely yours, Mrs. Jones



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