

The Disappearing Licorice

Ms. Perry arrived at school early on Friday morning. She walked into her classroom and set down her bag and her coffee mug on her desk. Just then, she noticed a piece of licorice on the floor by her desk. "That's weird," she thought as she bent down to pick it up. As she got started on her preparations for the day, Ms. Perry quickly forgot about the licorice on the floor.

The day passed in a whirl of activity. The science experiment was a raging success. The class had guessed that baking soda and vinegar together would create a chemical reaction, and indeed that was true. Miniature volcanoes erupted across the classroom as everyone mixed the materials. After science, the class had free reading time. They had earned enough class points throughout the week to get twenty minutes of free reading time and a stick of red licorice each.

The class lined up at Ms. Perry's desk to get their treat. She kept the big tub of red licorice in her file cabinet. As she pulled the tub out of the drawer, she frowned.

"What's wrong, Ms. Perry?" Jamal asked her. He was lucky enough to be the first person in line.

"Ummm, nothing...I think," said Ms. Perry. "It's just that I thought I had more licorice left in here. It looks like I'm almost out."

Jamal looked behind him at the long line of students. "You'd better have enough, Ms. Perry," he said with a smile. "You have a whole lot of people here who would be very upset if they didn't get their share. You might have a war on your hands!"

Ms. Perry laughed. "I think we'll be all right, Jamal," she said. "Although I'm happy to see that you're putting your learning about early America to work." They had been studying the American Revolution, and Ms. Perry was delighted to see her students making connections with their lives.

After class was dismissed for the day, Ms. Perry sat at her desk with a pile of tests to grade. She was hungry, so she pulled out the tub of licorice, grabbed the last three pieces, and threw the empty tub in the recycle bin. As she ate, she thought about how she had bought the tub less than two weeks ago. Usually they lasted for almost a month. No students were ever in the classroom unless she was there as well, and she always locked the door behind her. Her desk was in the back corner of the room, so no students were ever near her desk during class time. "Strange," she thought, and started grading the tests.

Ms. Perry bought another tub of licorice over the weekend, and it was sitting on her

desk when the students came into the classroom on Monday. All the students' eyes lit up when they saw it.

"Friday can't come soon enough!" Lenora said enthusiastically.

"Ms. Perry, don't eat the whole tub yourself like last time!" Jasper said with a smile. "We know you love to munch on licorice every day after school."

Ms. Perry laughed, "I'll try not to eat them all this time. Now let's get settled and get started." With that, everyone sat down at their desks, took out their journals, and started writing.

On Tuesday after school, a group of students stayed in the classroom to help clean up. Jamal, Jasper, Lenora, and Carmen were always willing to help clean after school, especially because they knew there was usually licorice in it for them. After they had finished cleaning up, Ms. Perry got the tub out to reward them for their hard work. As she pulled the tub out of the drawer, she gasped.

"What's going on?" Ms. Perry shouted. "I just bought this tub. It's been here in the drawer all along, and now it's open and half the licorice is gone!"

All of the students gathered around her desk and started talking at once.

"Do you think someone stole it?" Carmen asked seriously.

"I don't know," Ms. Perry said. "Something weird is going on though. Jamal, have you noticed anything strange going on after school hours?"

Jamal lived right across the street from the school and could see their classroom from his house. "Nope, I haven't seen a thing," he said.

"As far as I know, nothing has ever been reported stolen from any of the classrooms," said Ms. Perry. "But I did notice that my door was unlocked once when I got here in the morning. I'll talk to the principal about it. Keep your eyes out for anything that seems strange." The students left, talking in hushed whispers. Ms. Perry wrote a quick note to the principal, Mrs. Bertolli, and dropped it in her mailbox on the way out.

The next day, Carmen and Lenora came rushing up to Ms. Perry as she unlocked the classroom. "Ms. Perry, Ms. Perry," they shouted in unison. "We saw someone last night, we saw someone!"

"Slow down girls. One at a time!" Ms. Perry said.

"Well, after we left the classroom yesterday, we stayed on the playground at the park down the street for another hour. Just when we were leaving, we saw a guy walking by with a handful of licorice," Carmen said.

"Yeah, he looked kind of scary too, so we ran home as fast as we could," said Lenora.

"Yikes!" said Ms. Perry. "Thanks for telling me. I'll bring it up in our staff meeting after school today to see what we can do. Meanwhile, keep quiet about it for now so we

don't end up scaring the whole school, okay?"

The girls nodded in agreement and ran off to play before school started. During the staff meeting after school, Ms. Perry told the rest of the staff what had been happening. She asked if anyone else had experienced anything similar. Hands began waving across the room. Mr. Jefferson said that he usually kept snacks in his desk, and they had been disappearing lately. Nobody had noticed anything serious stolen, like computer equipment or anything, but several people had noticed that food seemed to disappear. Just then, Jamal and Lenora came running through the doorway of the staff room.

"They caught him!" they yelled, "In your room, Ms. Perry!"

Principal Bertolli and Ms. Perry dashed out of the room, while the other teachers gathered around Lenora and Jamal. The students said that they were playing basketball on the yard when they noticed a teenaged boy by Ms. Perry's door. They told Mr. Elliott, the janitor who was close by, and he told them to go get the principal as he ran toward the classroom. The students ran to the staff room, while Mr. Elliott stood outside the door and waited for help to arrive.

When Mrs. Bertolli and Ms. Perry got there, they peered in through the small window in the door. They could see the teen in Ms. Perry's classroom with a handful of licorice. The principal opened the door and cleared her throat to get the boy's attention. When he looked up, he froze in place.

"Mrs. Bertolli," he squeaked, "what are you doing here?"

Principal Bertolli looked the boy in the eyes and said, "I think I might ask you the same thing. You know, don't you, that I'm going to have to call your parents?"

The boy squirmed under her stern gaze. "Mrs. Bertolli," he said, "I think it might be better if you let me call them first. Can we go to your office and try to reach them before they leave work?"

Principal Bertolli took a deep breath. She remembered how, when the boy was younger, he used to get into trouble at school for stealing other students' lunches. She thought about the reasons he might have decided to risk breaking into the school to take food. She also thought about how nothing of great value had been stolen and how no damage had occurred. Finally, she nodded and replied, "Yes, son, I think that's a good idea. Let's go talk about what happened."

As she turned, she noticed Mr. Elliott still standing there, looking a little frightened and a little embarrassed. "What I want to know," Ms. Perry was saying, "is how he got this key!" She held up a key that looked familiar to everyone standing there; it was the master key that opened all the doors in the school.

Mr. Elliott cleared his throat. "I think that I might be able to explain. You see, I

made a copy of my key just in case I ever accidentally locked mine in one of the rooms when I was here cleaning by myself. I kept it in my closet. A few weeks ago, I realized that it was gone. I guess we know now where it went."

On her way back to the staff room, Ms. Perry noticed Carmen and Jamal standing outside. "Nice job, Jamal and Carmen. You made the right choice in a bad situation," she said.

"I guess you could say we caught him red-handed," Jamal said.

Ms. Perry and Carmen groaned at his pun and turned to leave, thankful that the mystery had been solved.

1. How did the students get free time and a stick of red licorice on Fridays?

- A. They had to earn enough class points throughout the week.
- B. They had to be on time for class every day that week.
- C. They had to finish all their class work by the end of the week.

2. About how long did a tub of licorice sticks usually last?

- A. One month.
- B. Two weeks.
- C. One week.

3. How did Ms. Perry act when she went to get licorice for the class to eat after their science lesson and found the tub was almost empty?

- A. She thought it was funny that she had eaten more licorice than usual.
- B. She was concerned because she didn't think the tub should be so empty.
- C. She wasn't surprised because she knew that students often took licorice sticks.

- 4. What facts did Ms. Perry think about when she was eating licorice after school and trying to figure out why the licorice was gone?**
- A. Some students liked licorice more than others, and they knew how to get into the classroom when she was out.
 - B. She would sometimes let students stay in the class by themselves, but she was sure they never bothered her desk.
 - C. She had always kept the classroom door locked when she wasn't in class, and students didn't go near her desk.
- 5. What did the students think had happened to the first tub of licorice to make it go so fast?**
- A. Ms. Perry had eaten most of it.
 - B. Someone stole some of the licorice.
 - C. Some kids took more than one piece.
- 6. What did Ms. Perry start to think when she found that half of the licorice in the new tub she had just bought was gone?**
- A. Someone must like licorice enough to steal it.
 - B. Someone must be playing a joke on her and the class.
 - C. Something strange must be going on after school hours.
- 7. What was Ms. Perry like when she realized the licorice might have been stolen?**
- A. She got very worried about it and asked Principal Bertolli to call the police.
 - B. She was angry about it and wanted to find a way to catch the thief.
 - C. She remained calm and shared the information with other teachers.
- 8. At the beginning of the story, what did Ms. Perry think about the piece of licorice she found on the floor by her desk?**
- A. One of her students must have dropped it.
 - B. It was weird that the licorice would be there.
 - C. The janitor must not have cleaned the room.

- 9. What did Ms. Perry find out from other teachers at the staff meeting?**
- A. She was the only one who had food disappear from her room.
 - B. She wasn't the only one who had food disappear from her room.
 - C. All of the other teachers had food disappear from their rooms.
- 10. What was the teenager like when he was caught?**
- A. He didn't try to argue his way out of it or try to run away.
 - B. He tried to convince Principal Bertolli that he didn't do it.
 - C. He acted like he didn't do it and wanted to call his parents for help.
- 11. What important thing did Ms. Perry remember to report to the Principal?**
- A. Nothing had ever been stolen from any of the classrooms before.
 - B. Only half of the licorice had been taken from each new tub.
 - C. Her door was unlocked one morning when she got to school.
- 12. What happened right after Principal Bertolli and Ms. Perry saw a teenager in Ms. Perry's classroom with a handful of licorice?**
- A. Mr. Elliot, the janitor, came to help and stood outside the door of the room.
 - B. Principal Bertolli opened the door and got the attention of the teenager.
 - C. The teenager asked what Principal Bertolli was doing in Ms. Perry's room.
- 13. Why did Mr. Elliot look a little frightened and embarrassed?**
- A. He thought he was going to get into trouble for not catching the thief sooner.
 - B. He knew he should have told Principal Bertolli about making another master key.
 - C. He was afraid that he would get fired because he didn't do his job well.
- 14. How did the teenager get caught?**
- A. Ms. Perry saw someone in her classroom taking the licorice tub out of her desk.
 - B. The janitor saw the teenager go through the classroom door, and he locked him in.
 - C. Two of Ms. Perry's students saw him by the classroom door and told the janitor.

15. How did the story end?

- A. Ms. Perry was glad that the thief had been caught and that no one in her class had been hurt during the incident.
- B. Ms. Perry said Carmen and Jamal made the right choice, and she was glad that the mystery had been solved.
- C. Ms. Perry was thankful that she didn't have to keep buying more of the red licorice to replace what was stolen.

16. What was the teenager's life at home probably like?

- A. His family was poor, and they didn't have much food to eat.
- B. There was food to feed the family but no treats like licorice.
- C. There was always a lot of food to eat and a lot of treats.

17. What happened when two of Ms. Perry's students were leaving the playground at the park after school was out?

- A. The students got scared by someone and ran home as fast as they could.
- B. The students decided to stay at the playground for another hour.
- C. The students saw a guy walking with a handful of licorice.

18. Why did Principal Bertolli decide to talk with the teenager instead of calling the police?

- A. She didn't want to make a big deal out of it because he used to go to her school.
- B. She felt sorry for him and decided that he hadn't done any damage to the school.
- C. She knew his parents and thought that he should have a chance to work it out with them.

19. How did the teenager get the key to Ms. Perry's room?

- A. He stole Ms. Perry's key and made a copy of it.
- B. He stole Mr. Elliot's extra key from his pocket.
- C. He stole the key from the janitor's room.

20. What was this story mostly about?

- A. Figuring out why food was disappearing from teachers' classrooms.
- B. Keeping a school safe from teenagers who want to break in and do harm.
- C. Catching a thief who was able to get into classrooms without breaking in.