

We Do Activity
8th Grade Inference

"The Turtle" by Jim Bishop

There had been toys around the house before. Many of them. But little Dennis loved the twenty-five cent turtle more than the Erector sets, the book of games, the orange scooter, or the baseball mitt. The turtle was about as big as a coin. On his brown shell was his name: Oscar.

Denis loved him and Dennis was eight years old. He saved for a ninety-eight cent goldfish bowl and he packed small brightly colored stones in it, so that when water was added, Oscar had his own private beach. Then he placed Oscar and the bowl on a window ledge in his room so that the afternoon sun warmed the cold wrinkles in the turtle's legs and moved him, now and then, to slip and slide down the stones into the cool clear water.

When Dennis came in from school, he hurried to his room to see what Oscar was doing. Oscar was the first live thing that Dennis had ever owned.

One afternoon, Dennis hurried up the stairs and found Oscar on his back floating. As young as he was, Dennis understood the finality of death. His shoulders shook and his breath caught and a wail came from his lips.

His mother hurried upstairs. She saw her little boy standing, arms hanging straight down, chin on chest, and she heard the sobs. She knew the genuine sound and she stood in front of him and held him to her breast. It took her a moment to find out what the trouble was.

He was promised a new turtle if he would stop crying. It didn't help. The crying continued and no promise on her part could slow the sobs.

She phoned her husband at his office. He was irritable. He had a business to conduct. He got into his car and came home. He hurried straight up to Dennis's room and put his arm around his boy.

"You can cry as long as you like," he said softly, "but it will not bring Oscar back. When God calls us it means that He loves us so much that He cannot bear to be apart from us any longer. God must have loved Oscar a great deal."

The sobbing continued. The father kept talking quietly, insistently and inexorably. "Coming home, I kept saying to myself, 'Well now that Oscar is dead we should be asking ourselves what we can do to show him how much we love him.' Crying isn't the answer. It won't bring him back, son. What I think we ought to do is to have a funeral service for Oscar."

The sobbing began to slow. The boy was listening. He brushed his shirt sleeve against his eyes and he tried his first few words.

"What can we do for him, Dad?"

"Personally," the father said in a tentative tone, "I think we ought to bury Oscar in the back yard. We will invite Mommy and all the children of the neighborhood and I will attend too." Dennis stopped crying. His father took a solid gold cigarette case from his pocket. "See this? This is Oscar's casket. He will be the only turtle in the world buried in solid silver."

The eyes of Dennis glistened. "Will we have a solemn procession?"

"Certainly," the father said. "And I will get a big rock and chisel Oscar's name on it so that centuries from now, everybody will know that Oscar is buried there."

Dennis was smiling. He looked at the goldfish bowl in time to see Oscar flip on his stomach and swim toward shore. Dennis looked up at his father.

"Let's kill him!" he said.