

In the Attic

by Frances Hodgson Burnett *from A Little Princess*

The book A Little Princess is the story of Sara, a seven-year-old English girl. The story starts when Sara, whose mother is dead, arrives at a boarding school with her wealthy father. She is a nice girl who has many beautiful clothes and toys. Her father goes to India. Four years later he dies after losing his money. Sara must stay at the school, live in the attic, and work as a servant. It is a great change for her from her previous life as a rich girl. Miss Minchin is the head of the school.

During the first month or two, Sara thought that her willingness to do things as well as she could, and her silence under reproof, might soften those who drove her so hard. In her proud little heart she wanted them to see that she was trying to earn her living and not accepting charity. But the time came when she saw that no one was softened at all; and the more willing she was to do as she was told, the more domineering and exacting careless housemaids became, and the more ready a scolding cook was to blame her.

If she had been older, Miss Minchin would have given her the bigger girls to teach and saved money by dismissing an instructress; but while she remained and looked like a child, she could be made more useful as a sort of little superior errand girl and maid of all work. An ordinary errand boy would not have been so clever and reliable. Sara could be trusted with difficult commissions and complicated messages. She could even go and pay bills, and she combined with this the ability to dust a room well and to set things in order.

Her own lessons became things of the past. She was taught nothing, and only after long and busy days spent in running here and there at everybody's orders was she grudgingly allowed to go into the deserted schoolroom, with a pile of old books, and study alone at night.

Questions

Circle the correct answer to each question

1. Why did Sara want to do a good job?
 - A. She thought she would be punished.
 - B. She wanted other people to be nicer to her.
 - C. She thought it was fun.
 - D. She liked Miss Minchin.

2. How was Sara as an errand girl?
 - A. She was fast and sloppy.
 - B. She was forgetful and slow.
 - C. She was not very good.
 - D. She was clever, and they could trust her.

3. When was Sara allowed to study?
 - A. Early in the morning in her room
 - B. During the day with the older girls
 - C. At night in an empty classroom.
 - D. During lunch in the attic

4. Why did Sara not teach the children?
 - A. She was too young.
 - B. She was not smart enough.
 - C. Servants didn't teach children.
 - D. There was too much else to do.

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. willingness
2. reproof
3. domineering
4. exacting
5. dismissing
6. reliable
7. commissions
8. grudgingly

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) “her **willingness** to do things as well as she could”

a. wish; readiness b. inability; failure c. fame or reputation d. knowledge or insight

2) “her silence under **reproof**”

a. a tall roof b. blame or disapproval c. praise or compliments d. watchful eyes

3) “the more **domineering** and exacting careless housemaids became”

a. lazy; slow-moving b. uncaring or uninterested c. bullying; bossy d. pleasing or helpful

4) “the more domineering and **exacting** careless housemaids became”

a. relaxing or easy b. demanding or tough c. insulting; hurtful d. unavailable

5) “saved money by **dismissing** an instructress”

a. hiring; engaging b. penalizing; punishing c. educating; teaching d. firing; removing

6) “An ordinary errand boy would not have been so clever and **reliable**”

a. sneaky b. pleasant or likable c. true or trustworthy d. able to run; mobile

7) "Sara could be trusted with difficult **commissions**"

a. jobs or duties b. secrets; confidences c. food orders d. clerks; storekeepers

8) "was she **grudgingly** allowed to go"

a. reluctantly or slowly b. suddenly; abruptly c. quickly; immediately d. gratefully