

What Will You Be When You Grow Up, Grandpa?

There is always something new to discover.



AGES 6-9 · READ-ALOUD ESTIMATE: 7-9 MINUTES



On Monday, Milo came home with homework and an enormous question.

He had to draw what he wanted to be when he grew up.

“A dragon dentist,” he announced.

Grandpa looked up from his crossword. “A what?”

“A dentist. For dragons. Somebody has to look after their teeth.”

“Fair point,” said Grandpa. “They have rather a lot.”

Milo spread his crayons across the kitchen table. Then he looked at Grandpa.

“What will YOU be when you grow up?”

Grandpa set down his pencil. “Milo, I’m seventy-three.”

“So?”

“I grew up ages ago.”

Milo looked at Grandpa’s slippers, his cardigan, and the biscuit crumbs on his knee.

“Then what happened? Did you forget to choose?”

“I chose,” said Grandpa. “I was a mechanic. I fixed buses, tractors, and one ice-cream truck that played music even when its engine was switched off.”

“Did you fix the music?”

“Eventually. The ice cream melted first.”

Milo pushed a blank sheet across the table.

“That’s what you WERE. What are you going to be NEXT?”

Grandpa looked at the sheet. He hadn’t thought about next.

“Excellent,” Milo said. “We’ll have to interview you.”



The Interview

Milo cut a sign from a cereal box:

GRANDPA'S FUTURE — APPLY HERE

"First question. Can you fly?"

"No."

"Can you learn?"

"Possibly."

Milo wrote POSSIBLY under DRAGON PILOT.

"Second question. Do you like danger?"

"Not if it has sharp teeth."

Milo crossed out DRAGON PILOT.

"Third question. Can you keep a secret?"

"Absolutely."

"Good. What did you get Grandma for her birthday?"

"A—" Grandpa stopped. "Nice try."

Milo wrote VERY GOOD AT SECRETS.

They tested five jobs before lunch.

Grandpa failed the pirate interview because he asked whether the ship had safe railings.

He failed the magician interview because Milo found a coin poking out of his sleeve.

He failed the astronaut interview because he wanted to know whether the moon had a comfortable chair.

But he did rather well as a dinosaur trainer.

"Sit," Grandpa told Milo's plastic tyrannosaurus.

It sat.

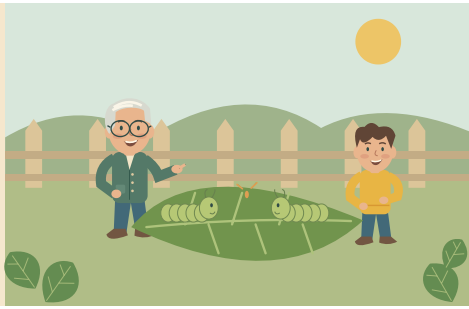
It had been sitting all morning, but Milo gave Grandpa a star anyway.

Grandpa examined the page. "These are very fine jobs. But why do I need a new one?"

Milo thought. "Because you still get up in the morning."

Grandpa looked out of the window, where a blackbird was tugging at an enormous worm.

"That," he said, "is a surprisingly good answer."



The Practical Exam

“Every important job needs a test,” Milo announced.

“How do you know?”

“School.”

“Of course.”

Milo took Grandpa into the garden.

“Find something nobody in this house has ever noticed.”

“That’s a big job,” said Grandpa. “Grandma notices everything. Yesterday she found a biscuit crumb in my slipper.”

“Then you’ll have to look harder.”

Grandpa inspected the vegetable patch.

“A snail?”

“Seen one.”

“A dandelion?”

“Seen hundreds.”

“A broken clothes peg?”

“Grandma’s been looking for that.”

Grandpa knelt near a broad green leaf. His glasses slid down his nose.

“Come and see this.”

Milo crawled over.

Two caterpillars were eating the same leaf from opposite ends. They crept closer and closer until—
BUMP.

Their noses met.

Both backed away.

“Excuse me!” Milo said in a tiny caterpillar voice.

“Excuse YOU!” Grandpa answered in an even tinier voice.

The caterpillars met again. This time one lost its grip and dropped onto a lower leaf.

Milo laughed so loudly that Grandma opened the kitchen window.

“What are you two doing?”

“Grandpa’s having a job interview!”

“Has he passed?”

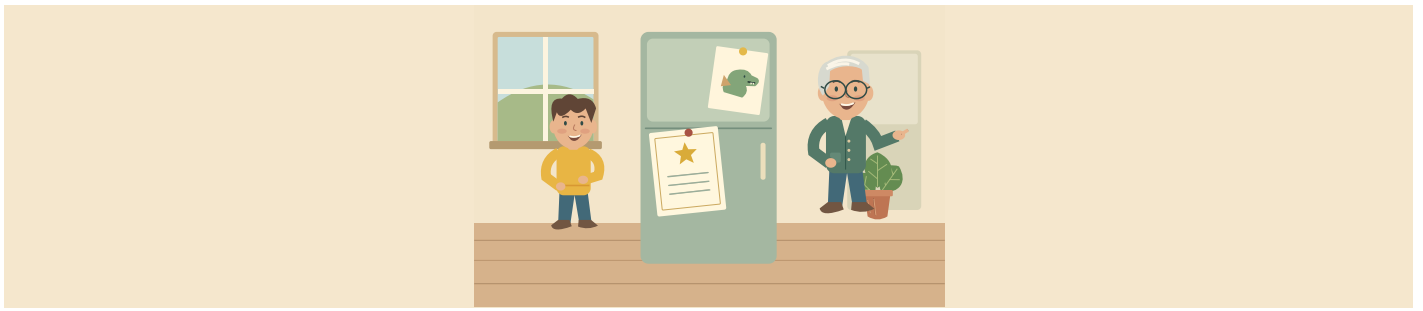
“Not yet!”

Grandpa stayed crouched beside the leaf.

“I’ve lived here sixteen years,” he said, “and never noticed caterpillars having such terrible table manners.”

Milo made a great show of checking his notes.

“Then I think it counts.”



A Very Difficult Job

That evening Milo presented a certificate:

NEW DISCOVERER

Age: 73

Experience: One Afternoon

Grandpa hung it on the fridge beside Milo's dragon dentist, whose patient had smoke coming out of its nostrils.

Then Milo frowned.

"There's a problem. If you're a discoverer, you have to discover things."

"How often?" asked Grandpa.

"Every day."

"Even Tuesdays?"

"Especially Tuesdays."

Tuesday was Grandpa's crossword day.



The next morning, before Milo arrived, Grandpa crept into the garden with a notebook.

He noticed three different beetles, a feather caught in the fence, and a spiderweb with a corner missing.

“Someone’s been busy,” he murmured.

Then he saw a line of ants carrying biscuit crumbs away from the back step.

“Where are you taking my breakfast?” he asked.

The ants did not answer.

Which Grandpa thought was rather rude.

He followed them around a flowerpot and found a tiny hole beneath the rim.

Out came his magnifying glass. Then his notebook. Then a biscuit for the journey.

By the time Milo arrived, Grandpa was lying on his stomach beside the flowerpot.

“Grandpa?”

“Shhh. I’m working.”

“At what?”

“Ant detective.”

Milo looked at his interview sheet. “That wasn’t one of the jobs.”

“I know,” said Grandpa. “I invented it.”



Milo thought about that. Then he lay down in the grass beside him.

“Can I apply?”

Grandpa flipped open his notebook.

“First question. Can you keep a secret?”

“Absolutely.”

“Good. Where did Grandma hide the biscuits?”

Milo opened his mouth. He closed it.

“Nice try, Grandpa.”

From the kitchen, Grandma called, “Neither of you is getting another biscuit!”

Grandpa and Milo looked at each other.

“A mystery for tomorrow,” Grandpa whispered.

Milo closed the notebook. “Good. Detectives need their rest.”

They went inside, leaving the ants to finish their breakfast in peace.

THE END