Name: _____ Date: _____

Jonah and the Night Hamster

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 574 words

Jonah's mom brought home a hamster named Pocket. "Hamsters are small, but their needs are big," she said. "A grown-up has to stay in charge. You will be my helper." Jonah nodded. Pocket was a Syrian hamster, and Syrian hamsters like to live alone, so Pocket had a cage all to himself.

All day, Pocket slept. Jonah tapped on the cage to say hello, but Mom shook her head. "Please don't," she said. "Hamsters sleep in the day. They need to rest where it is quiet, and nobody should wake them." So Jonah waited. He read a book near the cage, and the room stayed calm.

At dusk, Pocket woke up, stretched, yawned, and began to dig. The bedding in his cage was deep, so he could make tunnels in it. "Hamsters are diggers," said Mom. "In the wild, they live on dry, rocky ground. They dig burrows, and they make a cozy nest underneath."

Mom put a few seeds in Pocket's food dish, and she scattered some more in the bedding, so he had to hunt for them. Pocket stuffed his cheeks until they were round. Then he hurried off to his nest, where he hid the food away. "The word hamster comes from a German word that means to hoard," said Mom.

Pocket ran on his wheel for a long time. "Wild hamsters can run a very long way at night," said Mom. "Pocket needs a wheel that is big and solid, so he can run safely." Jonah checked his water bottle every day for leaks and blocks, because Pocket always needs fresh, clean water.

Pocket was good at escaping, because he could dig fast and he could chew through cardboard. "That is why we keep the lid shut," said Mom. "Pocket stays in his cage, unless a grown-up is watching. We never leave him out alone, and we never leave him out all night."

For the first two days, Jonah did not hold Pocket at all. A new hamster needs time to settle in. Then, one evening, Jonah laid his hand still in the cage, and Pocket sniffed it for a long while. "Let him come in his own time," said Mom. At last Pocket climbed on.

Mom showed Jonah how to lift him. Cup both hands, and let Pocket sit on your palms. Keep your hands low, just a few inches above a table. "Hamsters can't see very well," said Mom, "and a fall can hurt them." Jonah spoke softly, because loud noises scare a hamster.

After every visit, Jonah washed his hands with soap and water. He washed after touching Pocket, and after touching his food and his cage. Mom did the cage cleaning in the evening, when Pocket was awake. She kept a little of his old, clean bedding, because hamsters like their own smell.

One evening, Pocket did not eat his food. He just sat in his nest. Jonah did not try to fix it himself, but went to tell his mom right away. "Good," she said. "When a hamster seems sick, we call a vet." She found a vet who knew hamsters, and the vet knew what to do.

Now Jonah has a night plan. He lets Pocket sleep all day, and at dusk he says hello in a soft voice. He gives fresh water, and he watches Pocket dig. Ask a grown-up to look at Peabody Pets with you. You will find it at pet.peabody.kids.

Questions

1. When does Pocket wake up and play?

A. At breakfast
B. At dusk and night
C. All day long

2. Who stays in charge of Pocket's care?

A. Jonah, all by himself
B. The neighbors
C. A grown-up

3. Why does Pocket need deep bedding?

A. To dig and tunnel
B. To keep his food cold
C. To look pretty

4. In this book, what does it mean to hoard?

A. To throw things away
B. To wash things
C. To save things up

5. What should Jonah do if Pocket stops eating?

A. Tell his mom, who will call the vet
B. Try some of his own medicine
C. Wait and see for a month

Words to know

hamster: small rodent
burrow: underground home
hoard: save up
nest: cozy bed
vet: animal doctor

Answer key: Jonah and the Night Hamster

1. B. At dusk and night
2. C. A grown-up
3. A. To dig and tunnel
4. C. To save things up
5. A. Tell his mom, who will call the vet